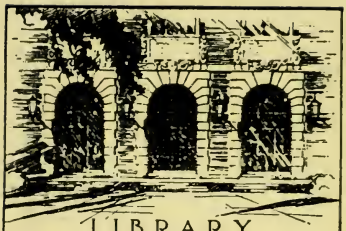

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A WOMAN'S TEMPTATION.

A NOVEL.

EDITED BY

THE HON. MRS RALPH DUTTON.

Such is my name, and such my tale,
Confessor—To thy secret ear
I breathe the sorrows I bewail,
And thank thee for the generous tear.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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WOMAN'S TEMPTATION.

CHAPTER I.

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together; our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues.—SHAKS.

We must be gentle, now we are Gentlemen.
SHAKSPEARE.

A CHEERFUL well-built house, with pretty grounds and bright garden; such was Geraldine's new home. The place had a lively, well-cared-for look; the Duke of Dorchester had built the house, and laid out the garden, and Leonie's munificence had enabled her sister to

furnish it prettily, though plainly. There was nothing dingy about her drawing-room, with its bright chintz, its green paper, and dark green carpet, bordered with water-lilies, its muslin-curtained windows, one of which opened on to the little parterre, gay with crocuses, hyacinths, and other spring flowers. A piano stood in one corner of the room, the gift of Lord Bournemouth, for now that Geraldine's improved circumstances admitted of her keeping two maids besides the invaluable Susan, she had time for playing and singing. There were plenty of books too on the table, lending library books, attesting that she also found time for reading, while the number of periodicals and magazines scattered about indicated that she did not think herself rich enough to give up the use of her pen.

Geraldine herself now enters the room; she is improved in looks, rosier, younger, less careworn. Also she is nicely dressed; her deep mourning is of good materials, and well made. If she does not look like the Geraldine Vivian of old, still less does she look like Mrs Lawrance's daughter-in-law. From the pretty little

bonnet, which replaces her usual straw hat, and the little pony carriage which stands at the door, we shall not be wrong in concluding that she is not bound for the village, but is going to call on some of her richer neighbours.

Increase of income has, of course, done much towards producing this favourable change in her appearance, yet not that alone. Her father's forgiveness—the feeling that she was no longer an outcast from her own people—has had the largest share in bringing back the light to her eye and the colour to her cheek. She is almost happy, as happy as she could be with William Lawrance for her husband; perhaps happier than most women would have been so situated. For she has still all, more than all, her old power over him, though her trials are scarcely less here than in London. True, his temper is somewhat mollified by his improved circumstances, but associating with Dukes and Lords has almost turned his head; he is apt to think that all the good fortune which has befallen him is a tribute to his own merits, rather than to his wife's. He has dined with Lord and Lady Lindon before he came down

into the country, and he has seen Lord Bournemouth for ten minutes; therefore he thinks he has overcome the objections of Geraldine's family, mistakes her father's punctilious courtesy for delighted approbation, and talks to his friends of the personal affection Lord Bournemouth entertains for him. Also they are often invited to dine at Dorchester Castle, as Lady Anne Fitzgermaine and Geraldine have become great friends; but Mr Lawrance does not fail to attribute the invitations to the charms of his own society. Perhaps he might be undeceived if he could hear the savage muttered curses old Lord Bournemouth sends after him as he leaves the room, could see the thunder-cloud Lord Lindon's brow always bears after one of his visits, the disgust which Leonie's politeness hardly enables her to conceal in his presence, or could hear Lady Anne say to her mother—as she invariably does when it is a question of inviting the Lawrances—"We must have dear Geraldine, mamma; but if we could only have her without her horrid under-bred husband! It takes away half the pleasure of her society!"

As he could not enjoy these advantages, how-

ever, he became daily better pleased with himself; and much ado had Geraldine to prevent him from letting out some of these remarkable opinions in the presence of her family, which would have been fatal to his peaceful intercourse with Lord Bournemouth at all events, as that gentleman would decidedly have declined seeing him again.

We have said that in his former days William Lawrance was in some degree fascinating. This was no longer the case. He thought his position so assured that he had no further need to be on his guard; his mind was so overrun with vanity, that some of it could not fail to appear in his manner, than which nothing is more fatal to fascination. His good looks were marred by the conceited expression he was pleased to assume; his entire air and bearing were the furthest possible removed from what one is accustomed to associate with the idea of a parish priest. He had lost the air of keenness and determination which formerly refined and gave an interest to features which, though good, were common-place in form and expression. And his disposition appeared to have

undergone a similar change. The quick perception of character, the resolution and perseverance which once distinguished him, seemed to be fairly lulled to sleep. He had attained already, with very little exertion, a position far higher than he could have hoped for, and this had entirely spoiled him for work. So many unlooked-for good things had fallen to him, that all he felt capable of doing was waiting to see how many more would come without his intervention. Parish work he had always disliked;—it was incessant, fatiguing, and brought no adequate reward of money or distinction. At first he really took considerable pains with his sermons, but little by little he slipped more and more into careless habits, and gave no thought to them, beyond dressing up old ideas in new language. He preached exclusively to the Dorchester pew—not an encouraging audience, for the only person who was certain not to go to sleep was Lord Fitzgermaine, and he could not be considered an attentive listener. After a time Mr Lawrance began to preach his old sermons over again, and did this so often that Geraldine, for very shame, was

obliged to interpose, and help him with something more than suggestions. His college reputation still clung to him, however, and he was sometimes asked to preach in other parishes for charities or missions—on which occasions he gave a ready assent, and wrote his own sermons. If the subject required narrative, or admitted of illustration, they were generally very good; and his hearers would return to their own homes, some envying Geraldine, and all envying the Fitzgermaine family. Meanwhile the whole village of Dorchester disliked him, from the Duke downwards. He indeed, in spite of his promise, half regretted having given way to his son's importunities; Lord Ernest openly pronounced the Rector to be a low-bred, conceited muff; and wondered what Fitz was thinking of, to stick him down at the gates; the Duchess shook her head as she found her pet old women unvisited, and the schools neglected, except by Geraldine; and Lady Anne declared in lively tones that he was insufferable, and often invited Geraldine to the Castle, but took good care not to go down to the Rectory. It was fortunate for

Geraldine that she did not realize the full extent of her husband's unpopularity; as it was, when she dined at the Castle, her happiest time was after the ladies had left the dining-room, as then she was relieved from the intolerable burden of watching his every word and gesture; and if he was making himself an object of ridicule among the gentlemen—which was but too probable—at least she was spared the mortification of hearing him.

Lord Fitzgermaine was the only person who refrained from openly abusing Mr Lawrance, a silent shrug of the shoulders being the only expression of his displeasure. Not that he did not feel the Rector's numerous imperfections as acutely as anybody; but, in the first place, he had been the means of bringing him to Dorchester, and, in the second, he thought any little defects in the husband amply atoned for by the charms of the wife. The old phrase, "I could have married her myself," was more constantly in his mind than ever, and the words were no mere form. She seemed to him more lovely and more fascinating than ever. Never in her most brilliant butterfly days had he ad-

mired her as much as now, when he saw her going about among the poor people, walking in her garden, or sitting in her drawing-room with her little daughter on her lap. It may be asked why he had not proposed to her while she was still free, and he had, to all appearance, the best chance—if any one could be said to have a chance—of winning her favour? The only answer to this question was to be found in Lord Fitzgermaine's peculiar disposition, which did not allow of his coveting anything until it was fairly out of his reach. Before, he had doubted and hesitated; wondered if she were precisely the person to suit him, and whether he did not admire some one else more; now, he felt perfectly certain that he had never in his life seen any one he liked half as well, and that she was the prettiest woman in England. Of this Geraldine knew nothing. She fulfilled her round of duties without noticing who admired her, and without supposing that any one could do so now. As she drove her little carriage through the village on her way to the Castle, far other thoughts than those of admiration and gaiety filled her mind.

It was a very pretty, very picturesque, and not poor village. The Duke was a good and easy landlord; he had plenty of work to give at good wages, when it could not be had elsewhere; besides which, the Duchess, her daughter, and her housekeeper, looked after the people thoroughly, and a good deal of money was spent on them. Altogether the condition of the village was somewhat eleemosynary, far from self-supporting; it could and did make political economists growl; its prosperity was not on a firm basis, as, let one of the Duke's great works be stopped — works by no means necessary, and in many cases undertaken solely to make work — and the difference would be felt immediately and disastrously; still the whole thing looked well, and, as long as it lasted, was well. No squalid poverty, no beggary, was to be seen; starvation was a word unknown; even want no sooner existed than it was discovered and thoroughly relieved. Therefore Geraldine saw in her drive no pinched faces, no tumble-down cottages; bright rosy

children played about the road—for school-hours were over; and each trim little house had its own trim little garden before it, with its few winter vegetables, and its bright plot of spring flowers. It was a satisfactory place to her; the sight of extreme poverty would have distracted her, she would have worked and pinched herself to death to relieve it; and the plenty and content of Dorchester were rest and peace to her. She thought, as she continued her drive, what people must be visited this afternoon; there was old Widow Hall; had William been to her lately? and an inward voice promptly answered, No; William never did go anywhere that he ought,—and the blind girl, Margaret Mitchell, had sent for some more wool for her knitting; and then there was the poor boy who mangled his hand so sadly with the turnip-cutting machine; she would take him a little bit of nice dinner. All these reflections occupied her till she reached the lodge gates, where the sight of the old woman who opened them somehow unaccountably reminded her of an unfinished

paper in her desk, that had been due for the * * * * * Magazine for the last fortnight.

"I will finish it to-night, and post it to-morrow," she thought; and then a group of children at play suggested some verses for a rather milk-and-water little periodical which she was in the habit of laughing at, and contributing to. She had composed a stanza or two, making merry the while at her own expense and at the periodical's; and, engrossed in her occupation, all but drove over Lord Fitzgermaine's favourite spaniel, scarcely noticing or returning its master's courteous bow.

"You will find Anne in, she has just returned from riding," he said; to which Geraldine, who was considering what rhymed best with child (besides "wild," which had been already employed), said, "Oh, indeed—thank you," abstractedly, and then drove on.

Lord Fitzgermaine looked after her, and sighed, somewhat sentimentally.

"She was certainly confused," he thought; "did it mean anything? does she guess? But what a fool I am!"—in which, perhaps, he was perfectly right.

Meanwhile Geraldine arrived at the Castle, and was shown in to Lady Anne, who had not yet taken off her riding-habit.

"My dear Geraldine," she exclaimed, "I have good news for you! Mamma had a letter this morning to say that Lord and Lady Lindon are coming the day after to-morrow for a week."

"Good news indeed," said Geraldine; "but how can they leave my father?"

"I suppose you know that Lady Lindon has had a bad attack of influenza, and wants change of air, so they proposed to come here, as we begged them to do, on the first opportunity, and Sir William and Lady Ellison are going to stay with Lord Bournemouth meanwhile. But I am surprised you don't know all this, though it is pleasant to have had it to tell;—I like telling a nice piece of news."

"I don't know how it was," said Geraldine; "both Lindon and Leonie are good correspondents."

"Well now, Geraldine, you will promise to be up here all day long while they are with us? You will dine with us—not the day after to-morrow, for they will come late; but the next day?"

"I will certainly dine with you on Thursday; but as to spending a week here, what would my husband and my parish say?"

"Your parish will do very well without you, and really it is a work of charity. I am dreadfully afraid of Lady Lindon. Fitz tells me she is so clever, and knows everything; and I know she is beautiful, and—I don't mean fine, but a very great lady."

And Lady Anne cast a satisfied glance at the mirror, which reflected her tall striking figure and distinguished face, as if conscious that it was beyond the power of beauty and fine ladyism to frighten her.

Geraldine smiled, and replied, "That last part of your speech was merely made to

draw a compliment; I shall not indulge you. I don't believe there is any one in the world as beautiful as Leonie, and she is 'great lady' enough to frighten any one, and wonderfully clever, and knows it; but now to give you a little bit of comfort, she is extremely agreeable, has plenty of conversation, and I am sure you will find her charming."

This was some consolation to Lady Anne, who, however well satisfied with herself externally, had an uneasy consciousness that she was neither quick nor clever. She would not have been pleased if any one had told her, "You are uneducated and dull; you know nothing;" nevertheless it was the truth, and she knew it. To do her justice, it cost her no pang to find that Lady Lindon was handsomer than herself; she had some vanity, but not a particle of jealousy, paradoxical as it may sound.

"Then you will come early on Friday morning, and bring little Freddie with you; if you don't, you will decoy Lady Lindon

down to the Rectory to see her, which won't please mamma."

"That's not fair," said Geraldine, laughing; "Leonie must see the Rectory. I am going now; Friday morning—at what o'clock?"

"Eleven."

"Eleven be it then—good-bye."

And she drove off, and on her homeward road, met and picked up her husband, to whom she communicated her good news.

"Very good," he observed. "I shall be glad to meet the Lindons. Your brother is a pleasant fellow enough, and has more in him than appears at first, if one only knows how to draw him out; and Leonie is a very pleasing person."

Geraldine bit her lips with vexation.

"Pray don't call her Leonie," she said.

"And why not? Is she not my sister, pray?"

"Sister-in-law;—it makes a difference."

"How so?"

"Between brothers and sisters-in-law, calling by the Christian names is quite optional; and as you are not very intimate with her,

it would be better to say Lady Lindon. I should prefer it, and so, I am sure, would they."

Mr Lawrance saw that he must give in, but it was a struggle; though he knew he should be worsted, he felt impelled to fight.

"Really I don't see why you should say we are not intimate, after the great attentions they have shown me—"

"You have dined once at their house, and called once," interrupted Geraldine; "that is not intimacy. Let there be an end of this; Lindon is very particular about these things, he would think it a liberty, and be seriously displeased."

We have given this as a little specimen of Geraldine's present conversations with her husband, and from it our readers may gather that, as time went on, she had not made any progress in reconciling herself to her terrible mistake. Many will call her wrong, and her conduct unbecoming and unwifelike;—and no doubt there are many women who submit to misery like hers, and worse than hers, without a murmur or struggle; who, almost literally,

when they are smitten on one cheek, turn the other. Such a woman was not Geraldine. If she had no protector, so much the more did she resolve to protect herself, and, maintaining a steadily defensive attitude, to keep her husband within the bounds of common decorum, and to win such an independent standing for herself—and her child in future—that he should be forced to recognise her right to be treated with some kind of respect, and allow her some liberty of action. To do this it was absolutely necessary to be firm in trifles; the smallest concession to him was a mistake she always had reason to deplore. He had never forgiven her her superiority, not only in character and mind, but in birth and breeding, and no means of mortification were too small or too large for him to use against her. She had learnt one or two lessons on this subject, and was not likely to forget them. Perhaps time might modify her feelings; perhaps circumstances might change, and a different line of conduct become possible; for the present she acted for the best, as far as she saw what that was, and, whatever her husband might be

at home, succeeded in making his conduct less conspicuous abroad.

We do not say she was right; we would only beg our readers to remember that it is very easy for by-standers to say how the battle should be fought, and very difficult for those who are actually engaged in the heat and turmoil of strife. No one learns to distinguish right from wrong in one day, but may esteem themselves happy if they begin to do so even at the close of their life's warfare.

Geraldine was happy when she found herself, at twelve o'clock on Friday morning, seated alone in Lady Anne's morning-room, with Leonie by her side. Lady Lindon looked wretchedly, miserably ill; not more so, however, than might reasonably be accounted for by influenza; and, ill as she was, Lady Anne was inclined to think Geraldine right when she said there was no one in the world as beautiful as Leonie. They passed a long pleasant day together; after luncheon Lady Anne joined them, and, with Geraldine to protect her, did not find Lady Lindon as awful as she expected; for Leonie understood in a very short

time the calibre of her young hostess, and took care not to startle her with independent speeches, or knowledge over much.

In the evening the Lawrances came to dinner, as agreed. Geraldine looked particularly fair and pretty in her black dress; there were a great many young hunting men at the Castle, and they admired her very much. She was the only young lady, except Leonie and Lady Anne; less formidable than the one, and more conversational and amusing than the other, she attracted more than either.

Leonie herself had never admired her so much as this evening; she watched her closely, and it became apparent to her quick perceptions that, though all the young men seemed to admire her sister, and crowd round her, Lord Fitzgermaine's manner was different from all the others. He admired her; and so did his brother, Lord Ernest, but in that young dragoon's manner there was a frank simplicity of homage very different from the elder's. Was Lord Fitzgermaine more in earnest, more sentimental, or what? She could not tell—he was alike, yet unlike; she wondered if Lindon

noticed it; by-and-bye she would ask him. It was characteristic of the young lord to be uneasy if any one was talking but himself, an egotism only excusable from the fact that he talked well; yet in no other case did Leonie remember to have seen him so anxious to stop his brother's conversation as he was this evening. He was far from stupid; Lord Ernest was usually considered dull; in general therefore he let his brother say out his say with sufficient patience; now he cut short all the stories of his horses and dogs with which Lord Ernest tried to amuse Geraldine, and broke in with books, pictures, music, anything, in short, about which he knew his brother must talk at a disadvantage. Leonie drew her chair near, and watched the game with increasing interest. Geraldine interrupted Lord Fitzgermaine as unceremoniously as he had interrupted his brother. She knew all he had to say; she had lately learned to think him shallow; she was really interested in some curious anecdotes Lord Ernest had been telling her about a favourite horse. He drew aside, frowning impatiently; none the less so, thought the

observant watcher, that his brother told his anecdotes well, and with considerable acuteness. He—the younger—was a fine manly-looking young fellow, albeit somewhat "heavy in hand," with a handsome, honest face; a good face, Leonie thought, far better than the elder's. Geraldine, since she had known more of him, had found him less silent than formerly, and had a certain pleasure in talking to him; he was not amusing, but she liked his frank, straight-forward bearing, and simple unconscious dignity, and she showed it. Lord Fitzgermaine's uneasiness increased; more than once he tried to talk Lord Ernest down, to put him at a disadvantage, to get up a laugh against him. Failing signally, he tried another move, and pressed Geraldine to sing. Lady Anne passed at the moment, and joined in the request; Geraldine, ever ready to oblige, went to the piano; Lord Fitzgermaine edged himself into the place next her, and his brother was fairly distanced. Now all he had to do was to listen, intensely silent, while she was singing, and applaud rapturously when she had finished.

"What does he mean?" thought Leonie. "What are all these grimaces for? She is singing prettily to-night, but she does not sing well enough to merit such extravagant applause. *Du reste*, I know he is not fond of music; *il ne s'y connait pas.*"

Meanwhile the subject of her reflections had sustained another annoyance. He asked Geraldine to repeat a French song, at the very moment that his brother asked her to repeat an English one. She liked the English one best, and sung it best; therefore she chose to repeat that in preference to the other. Again the cloud gathered over Lord Fitzgermaine; he was restless, moody, and did not recover for the rest of the evening. He took his revenge by going up to Mr Lawrance, and drawing him out for the amusement of the company, a process which cost him little trouble. It had one effect unexpected to him; directly Geraldine saw what was going on, she rose to go, and the party broke up.

"Lindon," said Leonie, when they were

alone together, "did you observe Lord Fitzgermaine's manner to Geraldine to-night?"

"Observe it? No; why should I? What was the matter with it?"

"Oh, you blind bat! you mole! I might have known it was useless to ask you," cried his wife, laughing. "Observe in future then; and give me your opinion by-and-bye. Remember, those are my orders."

CHAPTER II.

But often in the din of strife
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life,
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true original course;
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart that beats
So wild, so deep, in us, to know
Whence our thoughts come, and where they go.

M. Arnold.

Being under these peremptory commands, Lord Lindon devoted some of his spare moments to making observations. "Certainly Fitz is spoony upon her, but so is Ernest,

and a great many fellows here," was the result of these observations communicated to his wife.

"So they are; but there is something different in Lord Fitzgermaine from the others," she returned. "A certain *je ne sais quoi;* very indescribable, but very perceptible, for the rest."

"I know what you mean. It is very silly now, but in a couple of months he will have forgotten all about it."

"It is very wrong—very dangerous," said Leonie, gravely.

"Very dangerous—what nonsense, Leonie!" said Lord Lindon, peevishly. "How can that be? Women make such a fuss about everything!"

He was quite put out, for he saw that she was right, and feared that she would insist upon his doing or saying something decided, than which nothing would have been more disagreeable to his easy indolence; Leonie saw through his ill-humour in a moment, and laughed aloud.

"Don't be afraid," she said, "I am not

going to make you do or say anything at present, for the time has not come, and it would only do harm. Besides, as you say, it may pass off. And if it were not for Geraldine's peculiar position, I should consider it a mere trifle. But when a woman has never been in love, has a husband who does not love her, who torments her, and whom she despises, it may well happen that she should see some one whom she likes better."

"Really, you've drawn a pretty picture of Geraldine's affairs!" said Lord Lindon.

"A true one, you will own."

"May be. But surely a well-principled woman won't allow herself to think of any one but her husband—at least, so women say themselves."

"*Va pour le principe!*" returned Leonie. "*Mon cher* Lindon, you learnt that axiom out of books, not out of real life. When it comes to a question of not allowing oneself to think of any one but one's husband, the mischief is done. A well-principled woman will not allow herself to do wrong; she will control her feelings; none the less she may have

them, none the less she may be horribly, fearfully miserable. It is that from which I would save Geraldine. Lord Fitzgermaine is bent on his own amusement, it is nothing to him, for, whatever he may think, he has no feelings to be touched; she has, and it may prove quite other than a trifle to her."

"I don't think you know, if you come to that," said Lord Lindon, "that he is making any pretence. He is really taken with her."

"He taken with her! he is taken with no one but himself," said Leonie. "Mind you, I don't say that he does not think himself in very serious earnest, and a young gentleman with very fine sentiments, and very deep affections; only he deceives himself, he is not capable of having the one, or feeling the other. That heavy young dragoon, with not half his brother's head, has twice his brother's heart, twice his brother's honesty; he respects and reverences Geraldine; there is neither selfishness nor vanity in his admiration."

"That 's true, I believe," said Lord Lindon. "In fact, he wanted to marry her before she was engaged to Silverton."

"Did he really? I suppose he was too poor to propose?"

"Just at that time he was. He had good expectations, however, from an uncle, and would have proposed on the strength of them, only she never gave him the slightest encouragement. That was neither here nor there, however, for she did not give it to any one, and if he had had a sufficient income to satisfy my father, his chance might have been as good as any one's. He waited day after day, hoping to make some sort of impression; and then, poor fellow, to his dismay and consternation, her engagement was announced. A week afterwards his uncle died, and left him three thousand a year, and the major of his regiment died, so that he got his captaincy without purchase. There never was such a piece of ill-luck as both events coming off a week too late!"

"And then, as she was engaged, he could do nothing. Did he know how she hated Lord Silverton?"

"Yes, he did, which made it all the worse. I believe, if I had been at home, I might,

even then, have arranged matters, for Silverton knew so well that she never wished to marry him, that had there been any one to take her part, he must have given her up. In fact, his claim was so abominably unjust that, even as it was, Ernest thought of appealing to my father, who, I believe in my heart, would have been glad enough of an excuse for breaking off the whole business."

"And why did he not?"

"The same impediment which hindered his proposing in the first instance; he could not say that Geraldine liked him. And it would have been rather too cool to suggest breaking off her engagement on the speculation of her happening to take a fancy to him. So he had to put up with his disappointment; and a very great one it was, I fancy."

"He seems to have recovered it tolerably."

"It won't kill him, if you come to that; though I see no symptoms of his making up to any one else. He is too honourable, however, not to get over it now that she is married, and, I have no doubt, already thinks of her as

nothing more than an old friend. Now if all this were Fitzgermaine's story instead of Ernest's, I own I should not like his attentions; but Fitz never, to my knowledge, cared for her, and Ernest I would trust in everything; even to selling me a horse I had not seen, and, all things considered, a man can't say fairer than that. I only wish Geraldine had been pleased to make him my brother-in-law instead of that—"

"Don't become vituperative; we all know what Mr Lawrance is. But tell me, how did you learn this? Not from Lord Ernest?"

"Arthur first put me on the scent. You remember my going to see him when we first came to England? I cross-examined him pretty closely, and soon saw how everything had come about, for he was only too glad to find any one willing to listen. At last he said, 'And only think, Lindon, she might have married Lord Ernest any day, if she had chosen!' I inquired more into it, and thought he was probably right; so one day, when Ernest and I were talking, and grew rather con-

fidential, something brought the subject up, and I put a leading question, which drew out the whole story."

"And how did he tell it?"

"Very simply and shortly, as a matter which he wished me to know, and felt I should understand, but with such curious reticence and self-respect, that I could hardly think it was Ernest speaking. Not at all like the story of a hopeless first love."

"Does Geraldine know this?"

"No, and I hope to goodness she never will. It would be very hard on her, and put her in a very equivocal position. I don't know how she should, though, for the secret is between him, you, and me, and we are none of us likely to tell her. That is the full, true, and particular account of the business — which might be an uncomfortable one for her, if Ernest were any one but himself. As to Fitzgermaine's eccentricities, I think you take them too seriously."

"Time will show. But I see you are impatient to go; there are our two young gentlemen

waiting for you below with the phaeton. Where are you going?"

"Going to Muddleborough, to look at a horse."

"*Allez donc;* as Lord Fitzgermaine will be away, and can't offer to accompany me, I will walk down to the Rectory."

Geraldine was busy writing when her sister-in-law entered her drawing-room.

"*Que fais-tu là?*" said Leonie, as she sat down exhausted.

"My dear Leonie, how tired you look!" said Geraldine, jumping up. "I was meaning to come up to the Castle when I had finished this. How could they let you walk down? You are not fit for it yet.

"Small blame to them," said Leonie. "They offered me every horse, pony, and carriage in the stables, but I took it into my head to walk, and an avalanche in my path would not have stopped me. What are you writing?"

"A sermon," said Geraldine, with a shy laugh, and becoming very red.

"Ah, I understand; to-day is Saturday, is

it not?" said Leonie, smiling as she remembered that Lady Anne had told her Mr Lawrance's sermons were the best of his performances.

"You will keep my secret?"

"I will, and I will leave you undisturbed to finish your task. Where is Mr Lawrance?"

"Well—fishing up the river, I believe," said Geraldine. "I see him returning, he is in the garden now." And Leonie, who felt that his presence would not be pleasant to his wife, and might tend to disturb her ideas, stepped out to meet him.

She could not be impolite, she was far too thorough-bred, and the more she disliked a person, the more scrupulously civil was her manner to him. Besides, she was determined to be agreeable to Mr Lawrance, that he might stay with her, and leave his wife in peace, and succeeded so well, that he began turning over in his mind the question of calling her by her Christian name. He could not decide the point; to set against his own hankering to do so, there was Geraldine's prohibition; and with all Leonie's charm of manner, and frank, gentle

courtesy, there was a dignity, an unapproachableness about her, which he felt, though he did not own it, and which was exceedingly repressive of familiarity. She held him in check; she was the sort of woman in whose presence he felt uneasy at saying a conceited thing, or a rude thing, even to his wife; he never appeared to better advantage than when talking with her, and for Geraldine's sake, she was well content that it should be so.

Geraldine had now finished her discourse, and put it into her husband's sermon case; she came out into the garden, and joined them.

"As I was coming down the village this morning," said Leonie, "I saw the village doctor go in at a cottage door, and they told me a little boy there had fallen down and broken his leg; I think they said his name was Joe Harris."

"Dear me," said Geraldine, "I am so sorry; the Harris's are great favourites of mine; I must go this afternoon and see him."

"Mr Lawrance," continued Lady Lindon, "who lives in that pretty white cottage by the bridge?"

"A family of the name of Smith," he returned; "the father works for the Duke."

"No, William, you forget," said Geraldine quickly, "they left last week, and went to Wroughton; John Wallis has taken the cottage."

"I dare say," returned Mr Lawrance, supremely indifferent; "you know better than I do; I have not been that way lately."

Considering that "that way" was the high road through the village, Leonie thought this a tolerably frank admission. Apparently Geraldine did too, for she cast a furtive glance at her sister, who however, being in the humour for investigations, chose not to see it.

"What is the average number of children at the school?" she pursued.

"Geraldine, you know; what is it?" said Mr Lawrance.

"From ninety to a hundred through the winter; rather less in summer. We are trying to get a pupil teacher, but the Lords in Council are very tiresome about it, though we want one sadly."

"I dare say," said Leonie; "how many teachers have you? The master and mistress; and you and Mr Lawrance, occasionally; and have you any help from the farmers' sons and daughters?"

"Oh, for that, Lady Lindon," said Mr Lawrance, laughing, "I haven't much to do with the teaching, it is not my forte, my wife understands the thing far better."

"Pretty well for an ex-tutor," was Leonie's mental comment; "this gentleman is singularly candid. You can scarcely have time," she said aloud, with a queer smile.

"That's just it," he replied, "what with one thing and another; writing one's sermons and all that, time slips away before one knows it is gone."

Leonie was here seized with a fit of coughing; a curious, spasmodic fit, which lasted some time, and which had the effect of making Geraldine blush very much, and then laugh too.

"What are you going to do this afternoon, Geraldine?" inquired Lady Lindon when she had recovered herself.

"I am going to pay a round of cottage visits."

"And you, Mr Lawrance?"

"Oh I? Really I don't know—when the sun is a little off the water I shall take my rod and have another try. Geraldine is fond of fish, and likes it quite fresh."

"Ah," said Leonie; "do you dine at the Castle to-night?"

"Yes, I believe so."

Here Geraldine's blushes increased so much that Leonie was obliged, out of pity, to stop, much as her researches entertained her.

"You will give me some luncheon, Geraldine?" she said.

"Yes, and drive you up to the Castle afterwards. You must not walk back."

"But your visits, your poor people?"

"I shall have time for them afterwards."

"Apparently your time does not slip away before you know it is gone," thought Leonie, and much she would have enjoyed expressing the thought, but for the fear of paining her sister-in-law.

"Then you won't come with me, I sup-

pose?" said Mr Lawrance. "It's very awkward, having to land one's own fish. However, you can call at the Sanford's as you go by, and send Sam to me. Now where can I have put that letter?" he continued, feeling in his pockets.

"What letter?" inquired Geraldine.

"The one from Dick Murphy, enclosing the flies from Ireland. Oh, I remember, I left it up-stairs. Just run up and fetch it; it's in the left-hand drawer of my dressing table."

Geraldine, without a word, went, whereat Leonie opened her eyes, and thought of a good many things.

"Mina," she said, when Geraldine had returned, and they were sitting at the neat little luncheon, "are you coming to town this spring?"

"I thought we might do so; my father sent me a most pressing invitation, and I thought we might go for the space of two weeks; leaving some Monday, and coming back the second Saturday following, so as only to miss one Sunday."

"Geraldine," said Mr Lawrance solemnly,

"perhaps you are not aware that my mother is coming to visit us."

"Eh! *la belle mère!*" thought Leonie; then, with the utmost suavity of manner, she said, "But when does Mrs Lawrance come, Mr Lawrance?"

"In about a month, Lady Lindon."

Geraldine's one thought, since this visit was inevitable, was gratitude that the Duke and Duchess would be in London by that time.

"Then I have a place that will suit exactly," said Leonie; "you must return with us to London next Monday."

"Such short notice!" said Geraldine smiling.

Mr Lawrance looked gloomy, and said that he knew it would be impossible to find any one to take his duty, the Sunday they should be away, and that there was a Missionary Meeting in the School-room next Thursday that he must attend.

"Then," said Leonie, with ever-increasing suavity, "you must let me take Geraldine with me, and come yourself on the Monday following, and we must persuade you to make

the visit three weeks instead of a fortnight."

"We may as well, William," said Geraldine; "of course when your mother comes she will make a long visit, and we shall not be able to leave all the summer; besides which, if we stay three weeks, I shall have a glimpse of Arthur."

"Oh, you must, I will take no denial," said Lady Lindon; and Mr Lawrance, flattered at being pressed by a Viscountess to visit an Earl, made no further resistance.

"And now, Leonie, put on your hat," said Geraldine. "I am sorry to order you off the premises, but otherwise I shall scarcely have time for my poor people."

"Very well. Mr Lawrance, I wish you much success in fishing. Are trout in season now?" And without waiting for an answer, she took up her hat, and with a bend of her beautiful head, passed out into the garden.

Though she and her sister set out almost directly, it was long before Leonie returned to the Castle, for she persuaded Geraldine to let her accompany her in her round of parish

visits. She sat, profoundly meditative, while she listened to the clear and simple manner in which Geraldine talked to the cottagers, the intimate knowledge she showed of all their circumstances, and the skill with which she adapted herself to each separate individual.

"I could not do this," thought Lady Lindon; "with all my boasted intellect, I have not as much talent ready at my fingers' ends as she has. For it is not her *specialité;* she would do it as well with the rich as with the poor; she has *savoir faire* with all classes. What is it? Undeniably, without vanity, I am what they call the cleverest, I know, far the most; yet here I recognise a class of people, a phase of life, with which nothing in my head sympathizes, however much my heart may be touched. These people would be a blank to me; I might visit them for ever, and they would remain sealed books; I should neither know the chord to touch, nor the one to let alone. And yet they tell me I have much tact, and I know it is true. For one thing, she is English, and I—I am cosmopolitan. Is she better than I am? Is that the secret? Perhaps—I think it must

be. I am not good, I know—I have no natural tendency to religion; I inquire into all, take nothing on trust; my spirit is too *moqueur.* She is more pious by nature, more humble; faith is more spontaneous in her than in me, and faith is the essence of piety. With me, to believe is an act of reason; with her, what? An inspiration; she believes because she believes."

Leonie's reflections were here interrupted by hearing an old dame, in whose cottage she was sitting, say, "Is that your sister, my Lady? Oh, she's beautiful surely, she do look nice, and yet your face pleases me best. It goes to my heart like."

"Most appropriate to my thoughts!" was Leonie's comment. "Perhaps that is part of the secret."

They drove to the Lodge Gates, where Leonie insisted on being put down, that she might not take Geraldine out of her way.

She walked slowly through the Park, revolving many questions of this sort in her mind. Every now and then she was seized with fits of unconquerable mental despondency. The general feeling of her mind was

humility; we are not going to repeat the old phrase about being too clever not to be humble, for we are doubtful of its general truth; but she habitually thought little of herself, and was inclined to underrate, not perhaps her intellect, so much as her knowledge and her character. When these fits came on, she underrated everything, character, intellect, and information; head, heart, and spirit were unmercifully condemned; she would count herself lower than all the world besides, and yet would often laugh to see how, if she passed her whole acquaintance in review, and asked herself, "Would I be like them?" the invariable answer was, "Not for worlds." She was in full self-accusatory tilt when she entered the Castle, and was accosted by Lady Anne with, "Well, and how do you like the Rectory?"

"Very much, and Geraldine is an excellent Rector."

Lady Anne opened her great eyes. "Mr Lawrance, you mean,—well, you are the only person who likes him. *Chacun à son goût.*"

"I wonder," pursued Leonie, "how much husbands, on an average, owe to their wives?

They tell me Lord Lindon has a good head for business; I know I have. I have heard of an M.P. whose wife 'crammed' him with all his speeches; he was thought sensible and well-informed, and an uncommonly useful working member of his party. I have heard to-day—"

"What?" said Lady Anne, whose eyes were becoming larger and larger.

"A strong argument against the celibacy of priests," said Lady Lindon laughing.

Lady Anne stared, and thought her very incomprehensible, and rather odd.

"I almost wish papa had given the living to Frederick Fitzgermaine, instead of to Mr Lawrance," she said pensively, "though it is delightful to have dear Geraldine here."

"What is Mr Fitzgermaine like?" inquired Leonie.

"Oh, he is quite delightful!" said Lady Anne. "So devoted a son of the Holy Catholic Church. He would have had daily service, and service on the Saints' Days, and all those things that one likes so much."

"By which I understand he is what the English call High Church?" said Leonie.

"And don't you think the High Church party are right? Don't you think they are nearer the rule of the primitive Fathers of the Church than any others?" said Lady Anne eagerly.

"Eh, *ma foi!* I care very little about it. You look scandalized; remember I was brought up in the West Indies, where these things are not discussed, not even thought of. I take my religion as I find it in the Bible; I take Jesus Christ and His Apostles as my models. I do not care if a man knows nothing of the Fathers, if he never opens his Church on a Saint's Day; so long as he is a Christian in heart, I care little for the form."

Lady Anne looked shocked, nay scared.

"The Bible!" she said. "Of course I take the Bible as my guide; but we are not to interpret it as we please; the Holy Church is our proper interpreter."

"Where do you find that written?" said Leonie. "Every one must judge for himself. Ah, I was brought up free; free mind and free judgment. I could not live in your atmosphere of restraint and dogmas. I should

be stifled with Church incense. *Allons, petite nonnette,* you are two centuries—four behind your time."

The levity of this last address completed Lady Anne's consternation; perhaps it hurt her pride to be told that she was four centuries behind her time, when she thought herself in the vanguard of reform; however that might be, she considered Lady Lindon a most dangerous, free-thinking person; fascinating certainly, but poisonous, like forbidden fruit. She trembled for the next sentence; it was a relief when Leonie suddenly said, "May I have two white camellias and some stephanotis out of the hot-house? I saw quantities there, and I want some for my hair to-night."

This was reasonable, this was intelligible, and Lady Anne felt it a pleasure to comply.

"Certainly, I will tell the gardener to gather some. What dress shall you wear?"

"Black silk, with flounces, and black lace over them."

This also was satisfactory; Lady Anne's own dress was to be white, therefore they would not interfere with one another. And

when Leonie, seeing her twisting about some scarlet geraniums very awkwardly, offered to make them up for her wreath and bouquet, she began to wonder if a person so obliging, and possessing such practical gifts, could be so very dangerous as she had supposed. At all events there must be some good in her, or Geraldine would not be so fond of her. Leonie smiled; she read what was passing in the young lady's mind; she had seen the look of horror, and liking popularity well, had purposely tried to conciliate her young companion. For the next hour, no one could have accused her of advancing anything dangerous in matter or manner.

"*Tiens!*" she said at length. "*Voilà ces Messieurs qui rentrent.* I shall go to my room; I am too tired now to hear all the run talked over, and all the leaps and falls discussed."

"You look wretchedly ill," said Lady Anne, "you have done too much to-day."

"Not too much," thought Leonie; "I have gained one or two new ideas, and done one good deed."

This evening was much gayer than the last.

Several of the neighbouring families came to dinner, and among them were a great many young people. Accordingly Geraldine was, as it were, deserted by nearly all the young men except Lord Ernest and his brother. Again Lady Lindon noticed that peculiar manner in Lord Fitzgermaine that she so disliked; indeed, owing perhaps to the comparative crowd, it was more marked than ever, so that even Lord Lindon was displeased; even Geraldine appeared to see that she was singled out, and to try to shake off her admirer.

Leonie was the belle of the evening, for there was dancing and music, and in both of these she excelled. She looked very beautiful, with her pale high-bred face, and queen-like figure, and the gleaming white stars in her dark masses of hair. She felt that she looked well, and was pleased, more on her husband's account than on her own, for she knew his friends were inclined to criticize his choice of a wife, and to think that she must be eccentric and outlandish; therefore it gratified her to glance in the long mirrors, and see that she was a very empress among the other women, unapproach-

ed, and unapproachable. Still she did not forget to keep her eye on Lord Fitzgermaine, and perceived that though Lord Ernest was dancing with, and talking to, many of the other young ladies, his brother continued to devote himself exclusively to Geraldine.

Geraldine did not dance anything but two quadrilles; she had given it up since her marriage, and Lord Fitzgermaine remained sitting on the sofa beside her, till other people as well as Leonie and Lord Lindon began to notice it. It was the more remarkable, as there were among the company the two ladies St Aubyn, for whose beauty he had been used to profess the greatest admiration, and who were universally popular in London and the country. Now he scarcely noticed them, certainly not as much as his position as eldest son of the house demanded. Geraldine felt that the thing was becoming unpleasant, and, leaving her seat, went to the other side of the room, and took a chair beside the Duchess.

"This is perfect folly," muttered Lord Lindon to his wife; "he has no business to behave in this way to a married woman."

"I have done one good act to-day," replied Leonie; "I have persuaded Geraldine to return to London with us."

"Have you? That's right," said Lord Lindon eagerly; "you always do the right thing."

"I thought 'women always made such a fuss about everything?'" said Leonie.

"Oh, but you're not like other women, you know," returned her husband confidently.

"*Merci du compliment!* I should wish to resemble my sex! The company are then going? I shall go to bed—I am tired to death."

"You look as white as those flowers you've got on your head," said Lord Lindon. "Nasty things, how they smell! Take them out, Leonie; they've made you faint. I shan't come up yet, one needn't be down till luncheon time to-morrow."

"*Apparemment tu es un païen, donc?* You will be down by breakfast time, you will go to church like a Christian, and you will hear your sister preach; no—I don't mean preach; but you will hear your sister's sermon."

"If you would just put your meaning into easy words, I should be obliged to you," returned Lord Lindon.

"What I say; you shall go to church, and judge if Geraldine is as good a preacher as she is a parish priest."

"Do you mean to say that that fellow—what a snob he looked this evening!—makes Geraldine write his sermons? Oh, I say, Leonie, this won't do; this must be stopped, you know."

"And how, pray? If you can give him—not head, for he is not altogether deficient in that; nor religion; but even conscientiousness and industry, he will write his own sermons; otherwise, for the sake of the afflicted family here, who have this incubus saddled on them, I think you had better let Geraldine continue to make them for him. And we shall take her away on Monday. Perhaps she will sit up all Sunday night, and write one to leave behind. She is capable of doing so."

"Shall we take the child with us?" said Lord Lindon.

"Of course. I wonder if your father will

care to see it? Fortunately it is like her, and not like him."

"And we shall have the fellow himself in a week. Well, so be it; what must be, must be. Only, if Fitzgermaine comes to town, don't let him make a club of my father's house. I can't have all the prigs and puppies in the country assembled there."

"There is the identical prig and puppy looking for you," said Leonie; "he can't think what married people find to talk about so long. It is not *selon les règles*. And there is the Duchess looking for me, and thinking the same, perhaps, for I observe that she can talk to everyone but her husband. *Cette pauvre* Lady Anne! *Est-elle donc médiocre! Est-elle bornée!*"

"If you would just remember that other young women besides yourself understand the French language, and confine those striking observations to your own room," suggested Lord Lindon.

"That's true. *Au revoir, mon ami.*"

CHAPTER III.

Knavery's plain face is never seen till used.

We must confess the truth; never since her marriage had Geraldine been so thoroughly happy as during the week that she spent at her father's house without her husband. The only drawback to her enjoyment was the thought that she must soon return home, and that when she did so, for the next two months at least, she had nothing more than Mrs Lawrance's society to expect. Her little Freddie was all the better for the change, and, wonder-

ful to say, Lord Bournemouth, who ordinarily could not bear babies, not only tolerated her, but even seemed to find a kind of pleasure in silently contemplating her through his glasses.

As Lord Lindon had foreseen, Lord Fitzgermaine presently appeared in London, and made an attempt to haunt the house in Belgrave Square; he was admitted the first time, and said sundry foolish things about Dorchester being a wilderness now Lady Geraldine had abandoned it; a sentiment which made Lord Bournemouth look queer. On his coming again, and repeating it in different words, the old lord informed his son that he couldn't have his friends dangling about the place if they talked such confounded nonsense, and inquired when Geraldine's confounded husband was coming; only perhaps his adjectives were somewhat stronger than we have chosen to repeat them, and began with the next letter of the alphabet.

Geraldine's confounded husband came on the appointed Monday, after having, as Lady Lindon had conjectured, preached a beautiful sermon of his wife's on the previous Sunday.

Leonie took care that he should interfere as little as possible with Geraldine, for she seldom allowed them to be together, but devoted herself with praiseworthy zeal to planning amusements and pleasures for her sister-in-law.

After the first fortnight, Arthur was at home for his Easter holidays; very much improved and grown, and overjoyed to see Geraldine again. Eton had not the least diminished his love for her, nor had marriage diminished hers for him. She interested herself in his friends, his lessons, and his games; he, wonderful to say, in her baby; than which a school-boy brother can give no greater proof of affection. To Mr Lawrance he was very cold, when obliged to be with him, but very civil, in compliance with private orders from Lord Lindon. In one respect he had gained by his sister's marriage; they could now walk about London alone together, and this he allowed to be a compensation, but was inclined to think "*le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle.*"

And so the three weeks passed quickly, and prolonged themselves into a month, when the

Lawrances were obliged to go home and receive Mrs Lawrance; and then the Mayfly was on the water, and Lord Fitzgermaine discovered that he had always been fond of fishing, went down to Dorchester, and sauntered about the meadows near the Rectory by the hour together, with a fishing-rod in his hand, and an always empty basket on his back. He sauntered alone, for even if Geraldine had not been too busy, she was too prudent to join him, much as she would have liked a little chat about her friends and their doings in London: still, though she was prudent, the neighbourhood was spiteful. There was not much said; in truth, there was nothing to say; but every maid, matron, and widow around thought that, as Geraldine had run away with her brother's tutor, she must be, at all events, careless in her conduct, and they were all on the look-out to detect a slip. A saint could not have escaped censure, far less a mortal who knew nothing of what was passing around her, and therefore saw no need of extraordinary caution. So a little spiteful buzz went on all through the summer, and grew as autumn came on; the

family returned to Dorchester, and Geraldine was often at the Castle, and received an astounding impetus when Lord Fitzgermaine came home for hunting, and began, as usual, hanging about the Rectory. It was in the middle of winter that Leonie, sitting in the drawing-room in Belgrave Square, was astounded by the apparition of Lord Ernest Fitzgermaine, whom she had supposed to be in Leicestershire, hunting, standing bodily before her on the hearth-rug, and depositing his six feet of height, and twelve stone of weight, in the arm-chair opposite her.

"Have you been long in London?" was her first question. "Lindon told me you were at Melton."

"So I was, but I've done up all my horses, and now I'm going down to Dorchester to get some hunting there, if my father can mount me. And as I was passing through London, I thought I might as well call upon you."

"You are very amiable," thought Leonie. "I am so sorry Lindon is out," she observed.

"Oh, I knew he was out; I met him at the corner of the Square."

Leonie thought it all very incomprehensible, for, on looking at the young man more attentively, she perceived a certain embarrassment in his countenance and manner, not usual to him, and which plainly denoted that he had not come to pay a mere visit of civility. Whatever it was he had to say, he evidently did not know how to come to the point, nor could Leonie help him, being utterly unable to form any idea as to what had brought him. Fortunately, however, she here observed:

"I wonder if I might trouble you to take a small parcel to Geraldine; it is neither heavy nor bulky, but valuable, being a bracelet that Lindon wants to send her as a birthday present, and I would rather not trust it to the post."

"I will take it with pleasure;—and—I wanted to talk to you about Lady Geraldine."

Leonie's face grew a shade paler, as she calmly drew a piece of work out of her work-

box, and begged him to continue. Which, however, was precisely what he seemed unable to do; he hesitated, fidgeted, stopped short.

"I don't know—" he blurted out at length, —"whether, when you were at Dorchester, you observed that Fitz—my brother, you know—seemed what we call spooney on her?"

"Well—yes," Leonie admitted.

"And perhaps you thought it was all nonsense, and would blow over?"

"Certainly; or, at least, Lindon did."

"Well, it hasn't."

"Do you mean to say—" began Leonie.

"I don't mean to say, mind you, that there is anything like a flirtation between them, because there must be two parties to that; only Fitz has been dangling after her all the summer and autumn, and people are beginning to talk about it. I dare say you think it very odd of me to come and tell you all this about Fitzgermaine, and, in fact, for a long time I thought it was no business of mine. But yesterday, when I went to my club, I heard some fellows there talk-

ing about it—well, in a way which Lindon wouldn't like if he heard it, and I thought I had better mention it to you. I turned it over in my mind whether I had better speak to Lindon, but that might have made a row, and I thought, if I told you, perhaps you might go down to Dorchester, see how the land lies, and just give her a hint quietly."

"What a thing is love!" thought Leonie; "under its influence, this young man, who, whatever else he may be, is certainly not quick, acquires perception, consideration, even fluency in talking. You take great interest in my sister?" she said.

"Yes—God bless her! that I do," he answered earnestly. "I won't hear a word said against her if I can help it."

"I am much obliged to you," said Leonie, "for your consideration in coming to me instead of Lindon; you were quite right in thinking it would be best. I will certainly go to Dorchester as you propose, and don't doubt that I shall be able to stop it without any *esclandre*. But how comes it that

anything is known about it here in London?"

"Do you remember when you were at Dorchester, and the St Aubyn girls dined there one night, that Fitzgermaine sat by Lady Geraldine all the evening, and scarcely spoke a word to them? Lady Arabella St Aubyn and he used to be great allies, and she has never forgiven him. She has been gossiping and spreading spiteful reports all through the season, when she could find any one who cared to listen; and since then she has been staying with the Claridges again, and you may be sure her tongue has been going pretty fast. Two of the men I heard talking in the club were Grenville St Aubyn and Charley Barking, a fellow who was staying at the Claridges' at the same time.—Well, I must go! I have told you all I had to say, and you can do what you think best about it."

"Good morning then," said Leonie, "and thank you very much."

"*Qu'elles sont dróles, ces Anglaises!*" she reflected, after he had gone. "Here is Geraldine, innocent and unconscious as a lamb,

while people are making free with her name, and young dragoons are taking up the cudgels for her! Apparently I was a very precocious girl; in fact, I don't think I was ever a girl at all, but had I been like Geraldine, where should I be now? I was fifteen when I married Don Pedro; he was a man to be neither loved nor esteemed; he brought all kinds of loose company to his house; even he tried to make me sit down to dinner with his mistress. There were plenty of men there to tell me that I was charming and beautiful, there was great licence allowed by the customs of society, there was much gossip, much tearing to pieces of characters, and yet I know that never a breath sullied my name. And Geraldine, in a country Rectory, with a family of the highest rank and respectability as a shield at her doors, contrives through mere ignorance to get herself seriously compromised! *Chose extraordinaire!* She has a husband who does not take care of her; but I had one who positively injured me. One thing is certain; if she can't look after herself, I must do it for her."

She rang the bell, and desired the footman to inquire if his Lordship was up, and could see her. To her great vexation she was told that my Lord had a severe attack of gout, the Doctor had been sent for, and he could see no one. Lord Lindon came in; even he was only admitted to his father's room for a few minutes, and when at length Lord Bournemouth was somewhat better, it was not, of course, the moment to propose leaving him. Weeks passed, and he became convalescent; but when Leonie, at the risk of being thought unfeeling and selfish, hinted that she had a cough which was becoming serious and required change of air, he would not hear of either her or his son's leaving him. Leonie next suggested that Geraldine should be sent for; neither would he hear of that; had he been one shade worse, she would have done it whether he wished it or no. She had been obliged to take her husband into her confidence, and repeat to him all Lord Ernest had said; he was as greatly disturbed as she was, and proposed that since they could not go, she should write. Very unwillingly she com-

plied; writing was neither safe nor satisfactory, but what else could she do? With infinite pains she composed and despatched a letter which should put Geraldine on her guard without hurting her feelings; and perhaps, if it had come sooner, it might have prevented mischief.

But while Leonie had been waiting, hoping every day to get away, at Dorchester things had been going on from bad to worse. The presence of Lady Arabella St Aubyn in the neighbourhood was unfavourable; she said things which no one else dared to say. Not content with criticizing Geraldine's conduct as a wife, she told stories about her as a girl; stories untrue, unjustifiable, which yet no one in the country could contradict, as no one but herself had known Geraldine at the time she spoke of. Among other shameful and disgraceful things, she said that it was Geraldine who had made love to her husband and thrust herself upon him, that she hated him now and tyrannized over him, her temper being so fearfully violent, that he did not dare say a word about her conduct with regard to Lord Fitz-

germaine. These reports went about like wild-fire; Dorchester Castle was the only house where they did not penetrate; the most inveterate slanderers knowing by instinct that it would not be safe to mention any part of them there. The neighbourhood was ripe and ready to believe anything against her; she, meanwhile, went on her way tranquilly, finding contentment, even a sort of pleasure, in her parish occupations, and utterly and wonderfully unconscious of what was going on around her. Lord Ernest, the only person at the Castle who was behind the scenes, had suddenly been obliged to rejoin his regiment; every day he had hoped to hear that Leonie was coming, and, when he left, still expected that she could not long delay the promised visit.

Lord Fitzgermaine meanwhile, receiving no rebuff, took Geraldine's indifference for encouragement. In love with himself, he could not conceive that every one else was not the same, and began to take greater liberties; even turning over in his mind the expediency of writing to her. And to hasten the crisis, one of those

kind friends that every man possesses, "thought it his duty" to tell Mr Lawrance what was said about his wife. On him the revelation came like a thunder-clap. This then was the secret of her coolness, of the airs she gave herself; this was why her manner was distant to him, this was why she despised him. She had a titled lover, a fine young Lord, to make her repent of her marriage with the poor tutor. Perhaps she had loved him before; perhaps it was because he had not proposed that she had so readily consented to the elopement. He raked up every small circumstance that he could recollect, twisted and put them together, and thought he had discovered why she was so often at the Castle, why she declared herself to be so fond of the water-meadows, why she was always in the village. Of course she was fond of the water-meadows when that scoundrel made them his regular afternoon lounge; of course she liked going into the village when he was always walking about the place. Why couldn't she stay at home, and mind her child, like other women?

So he brooded over the matter day after

day, jealousy working and fermenting in his heart, jaundicing his sight, till Geraldine's every word, look, and action was misunderstood, and misinterpreted. Was she conciliatory? It was to blind him. Was she preoccupied? She was longing to be rid of him, and join her lover. Did she stay at home? It was to receive Lord Fitzgermaine. Did she go out? It was to meet him. Judged in this way, who could escape condemnation?

Geraldine puzzled herself to divine what made her husband so additionally irritable, moody, even violent. With terror and consternation she perceived that she was losing her influence over him, she had not the same power that she formerly possessed. If he shook off her hold over him, how could she continue to exist?

Things went on in this way for several weeks, miserable weeks to her. Her face plainly showed that something was amiss: it was noticed at the Castle, and when Lady Anne spoke about it at the breakfast-table, Lord Fitzgermaine complacently thought that

her altered looks were to be attributed to secret love for himself.

At length the crash came. He had the inconceivable audacity to write her a note, in which he said that he had long observed how unsuited she and Mr Lawrance were to each other, how he himself loved her, how he hoped his love was returned, and finally asked her to fly with him. It so happened that the Lawrances were going to dine at the Castle that evening; so Lord Fitzgermaine gathered some stephanotis blossoms, put them in a basket with the note amongst them, and sent them down to the Rectory. In his note he begged her, if she agreed to his proposal, to wear the flowers as a token of consent.

Geraldine was out when the basket came; the note was accidentally dropped at the drawing-room door; so, when she returned, she saw merely a basket of hot-house flowers, which she naturally supposed had been sent by Lady Anne, who had done so many times before. She went up to dress, put some of the flowers in her hair, and some on her gown. Mr

Lawrance came in, the note caught his eye, he picked it up and read it, rushed up to his wife's room, and saw her standing before the glass with the flowers on her head and dress. What could he think? He stormed, he swore, he could not find words of abuse coarse enough to heap on her. She turned round, amazed, indignant, in her calm proud scorn.

"What do you mean, William?" she inquired. No answer—more abuse; till at length he threw the note towards her. She opened it; then indeed the colour forsook her cheek; then indeed she trembled, though not with fear.

"As God sees me, William," she said, "I never received this, or any other."

"You lie!" he exclaimed fiercely.

But why repeat the scene? It was horrible—disgusting. She never lost her temper, but stood in the same attitude of serene self-reliance and courageous innocence, calmly and stedfastly denying his furious accusations, when he would allow her to speak, and so retaining her superiority of bearing and words, that at length she reduced him to silence.

She then sent an excuse to the Castle, took off her evening dress, and sat down to think what she should do. Go up to London to her brother was her decision; when, hearing the rumble of wheels leaving the stable-yard, she sent for Susan, and asked who had the carriage.

"Mr Lawrance, my Leddy. He's packit up his claithes, and I'm thinking he's awa' to London." Geraldine's cheek flushed.

"That will do, Susan," she said.

"I cannot go, that is clear," was her reflection. "Leonie may send for me; if Leonie were only here! If I were to go, it would make people talk. What will they say at the Castle? Do they suspect anything? If they do, what must they think of me? Appearances are all against me! Oh, if I had only seen what he meant when he was always here! How could I be so blind? And yet who could dream of anything so atrocious, so disgraceful?" She went to bed, and cried herself to sleep with very shame and vexation. Next morning came Leonie's letter. Not till then was Geraldine's misery complete.

"No one will believe me," she thought. "If every one saw it, they will say that I must have seen it. How can I ever show my face here again? I will go to London—I will see Leonie. I must do something. Waiting here will kill me."

CHAPTER IV.

His reasons are two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff; you shall seek all day ere you find them; and when you have them they are not worth the search.

SHAKSPEARE.

THERE are some animals, and there are also some men, who, quiet and gentle ordinarily, become furious when roused. Of this class was Lord Lindon. In general nothing disturbed his placid good temper; when once excited, his anger was fearful and ungovernable. So when Mr Lawrance came up to town, broke in upon him at nine o'clock in the morning, began an incoherent story about

Geraldine's being on the point of running away with Lord Fitzgermaine, and announced his intention of returning her to her father, Lord Lindon went straightway into such a passion that even Leonie trembled.

"*Mon bon Lindon,*" she said in a low voice, "*calme-toi, je te le prie.*"

"Calm, Leonie, calm!" he broke out, "when this scoundrel is taking away my sister's character! It is enough that I don't kick him out of the house."

"Very well, my Lord, very well," said Mr Lawrance, trembling with rage in his turn, "since this is the way you treat me, I'll see what the law says to it. I'll sue for a divorce."

"You will do no such thing," said Leonie, in clear decided tones.

"And why not, pray?" he said, turning fiercely upon her.

"First, because you could not get one; secondly, because to do so you must show up certain passages in your life little creditable to you, your disgraceful elopement, and your equally disgraceful neglect of your parish duties, for instance; a neglect which left Gerald-

ine so much to herself, that you could not say, if asked, how she employed her time each day; whether she was really visiting your parishioners, or giving meetings to Lord Fitzgermaine, as you assert."

"Send for her—send for her here, and let her say at once he lies," broke in Lord Lindon.

"*Tais toi, donc!*" was the answer. "Mr Lawrance, it is useless for you and Lord Lindon to talk this unfortunate business over now, you are both too much excited; but we will, as he desires, telegraph for Geraldine at once, and when she comes we will hear both sides of the question. You will be good enough to excuse us now; Lord Lindon goes to his father at this hour, and I have letters of business to write."

And she bowed him out of the room with the air of a queen.

"You've rid the house of him; that's one comfort," said Lord Lindon; "now for my father. A pretty story this will be for him!"

"You must not go to Lord Bournemouth raging in this way, you will give him a fit,"

said Leonie. "Allow me to go instead; I will explain everything far more clearly than you can at present; and you take a cab, and go at once to the Telegraph Office. Don't send any frantic message; merely say, Mr Lawrance has been here, come at once."

"Well—I must do as you please, I suppose," returned her husband. "Scoundrel!" and with this parting epithet he left the room.

Leonie had now to give her attention to Lord Bournemouth, and as he possessed precisely his son's temperament, she had another violent scene to go through; indeed for some time it seemed probable that the old man would never get over it. At length she succeeded in soothing him somewhat; but what effect the sight of his daughter would have on him she dreaded to think. Then Lord Lindon returned, and he and his father raged and stormed together, till it occurred to Leonie to send him with the carriage to meet the next train, by which it was probable Geraldine would arrive.

Geraldine, meanwhile, having received Leonie's telegraph just as she was on the point of

starting, was filled with apprehensions for the effect her husband's story might have produced. By the time she reached London, she had persuaded herself that all her relations would believe her to be guilty, and was nerving herself with desperate calm to meet their reproaches. It was a relief to see her brother standing on the platform. At least she should know the worst at once.

Had Lord Lindon been furious with her, he must have relented at the sight of her pale cheeks and hollow tearful eyes. He busied himself about her luggage, but no sooner were they in the carriage and the door shut, than she said:

"Lindon, did you believe him?"

"Believe him! Not for a moment," was the emphatic answer, sealed by a hearty kiss.

"And Leonie? and my father?"

"Not they—they know better."

"And is he with you?"

"He? your husband, do you mean? Do you think my father would have him in his house? He is gone to his own people, I suppose. I don't care."

"He must have gone to Emily Turnbull's," said Geraldine; "you must send for him, you must hear the whole story."

"Of course—of course; there's time enough for all that. Here we are—and there is Leonie on the look-out for us at the windows. Good Heavens—how white she is!"

Very pale in truth was Leonie, for she most intensely dreaded the scene, or rather series of scenes, which was now to take place. She had some reason for her apprehensions; for, first of all, she had to console Geraldine, who burst into tears directly she entered the drawing-room, and refused to be comforted, or to believe her sister's assurances that she was not disgraced for the rest of her life. Then there was the meeting of Lord Bournemouth and his daughter, at which she was obliged to assist, as the old lord's rage broke out again at the sight of Geraldine's pale face, and it needed all Lady Lindon's influence—and she perhaps possessed more than any one over him—to induce him to be in some degree calm.

Then, last and worst of all, came Mr Law-

rance, his passion by no means abated; while Lord Lindon was equally furious. Then followed such a tempest, that Leonie was well nigh distracted. Geraldine was very calm in speech, though occasionally her cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkled, when her husband made some particularly untrue or ungenerous statement.

After Leonie had with marvellous tact and patience extracted the whole of his story, which amounted, in fact, to an accusation against his wife of having a secret understanding with Lord Fitzgermaine, of giving him private meetings, receiving letters from him, and finally consenting to elope with him, Geraldine said:

"Now I must beg you to hear my side of the story. I have received no letters from Lord Fitzgermaine, and given him no meetings; if ever I saw him when you were out, I am quite certain I always mentioned it to you; if you thought he came to the Rectory too often, you should have said so. That I had a right to expect. If, as you say, the whole neighbourhood knew

and talked about my conduct regarding him, I was as ignorant of it as a child. As to the note, I cannot conceive how he had the audacity to send it, or to say that he thought I returned his love; if you asked him, he himself must say that I never gave him the slightest grounds for supposing it. I never read the note; it was not among the flowers when I took them; I supposed they were from Lady Anne, and put them on, as I have done many times before when she has sent me some. You could not prove any part of your story, and you know it."

"Neither can you prove yours," said Mr Lawrance.

"Ask Lord Fitzgermaine himself—he must do me the justice to bear witness to its truth," said Geraldine eagerly.

"Ask him! Take his word!" returned Mr Lawrance, sneeringly. "I like that!"

"In this case his word is as good as another's," said Geraldine; "he would be glad enough to excuse himself if he could, by showing any letters of mine, or by saying

that he had sent me any, or had secret meetings with me."

"Oh, of course you take his part. We understand all that," said Mr Lawrance.

"Be silent, if you cannot speak without insulting her," broke in Lord Lindon.

"My Lord, I will not be silent for you or any man in the world," returned Mr Lawrance, violently. "She is my wife, and I shall say whatever I please to her."

"It appears to me," observed Leonie, "that at this rate we shall never come to any understanding at all. Perhaps if you could bring your brother-in-law, Mr Turnbull, who is as much Geraldine's friend as yours, to talk it over with Lord Lindon, we might be able to decide on our course of action more quickly."

"I'll bring Robert Turnbull, or any one else you like," said Mr Lawrance, "only remember one thing—I shall insist on a separation."

"I scarcely think, when we come to talk it over, that you will find it expedient or

practicable to do so," said Leonie. "But we will not discuss the subject till Mr Turnbull arrives."

"Go and fetch him here at once," was Lord Lindon's method of dismissing his brother-in-law. "Leonie," he continued, as Mr Lawrance left the room, "how could you say a separation would not be expedient? I think it would be the best plan possible."

"Oh, Leonie," said Geraldine, "you don't know what a relief it would be! You are not in my place—you cannot tell what I have suffered."

"Indeed I can, dear; and I can quite fancy what a relief it would be; but just because I am not in your place, my judgment is clearer than if I were. You must not think of a separation. It would place you in a thoroughly false position; not a creature would believe you innocent. Remember, every one misjudges you now; every one thinks you in the wrong; a separation would give the strongest possible confirmation to all these spiteful reports, which otherwise, we may hope, will die

out of themselves. If we make a scandal and *esclandre* about it now, your character is irretrievably injured. Our best wisdom will be to keep matters as quiet as possible; for which Lord Fitzgermaine may be sufficiently thankful."

"Confound him!" muttered Lord Lindon: "in thinking of the other one, I had almost forgotten him."

"Don't think of him now, then," said Leonie, "we can do nothing with him; we must let him alone; only I think we ought to get a formal acknowledgment from him of Geraldine's perfect innocence, and insist on his leaving England for a time."

"That is unnecessary, Leonie," said Geraldine. "I can never return to Dorchester."

"Not permanently," said Leonie; "I know that Mr Lawrance must exchange his living; still that will take some months; you must return till it is done, and visit at the Castle as usual; prudence requires it. And the Duke and Duchess will take care that you meet with no annoyance. They, at least, never

countenanced the reports, or thought there was anything unusual in their son's manner to you."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Geraldine. "I thought everybody condemned me. Oh, if I had been less blind! if your letter had come before!"

"Whatever is, is right," said Leonie sadly; "or I should say the same. I meant to come to Dorchester and warn you, but your father's illness prevented me; and then I expected to leave every day, and so put off writing."

"Here come Mr Lawrance and Robert Turnbull," said Geraldine.

"If it were only over!" thought Leonie. "Lindon, pray don't be violent."

It may well be supposed that Mr and Mrs Turnbull were somewhat astonished when William Lawrance rushed into their house, and assured them that he was not going to be trampled upon; he would have his rights, and no insolent lordling of them all should put him down. Nor were they less astonished when they learnt the primary cause of his excitement. Emily, even though not particularly fond of

her brother, was inclined to take his part; Robert prudently reserved his judgment till he had heard both sides. He consented to go at once to Lord Bournemouth's, saying it was a mere chance that he was at home and disengaged, being generally at his office at that hour. It was an embarrassing occasion for Mr Turnbull; he had only seen Lord Lindon once, and was not acquainted with Lady Lindon; to go to their house for the first time on such an errand was little pleasing to him.

Leonie, meanwhile, had been doubting the wisdom of making him a party to their discussion; she did not know Mr Turnbull; he might be, and probably was, by no means the sort of man she should wish to consult in such an emergency; yet what could she do? Mr Lawrance was unmanageable, her husband not less so; it was necessary to call in some unprejudiced person to whose judgment both would consent to refer, and who so proper as Mr Turnbull? His appearance reassured her; he had the manners at once of a gentleman and a man of business, and it was evident

that Geraldine was glad to see him. Very patiently he listened, till the whole story was told; and when Mr Lawrance at the end triumphantly asked, "There! what do you think of that?" replied, "That you have been too hasty. You have no proof that Geraldine received any letters from Lord Fitzgermaine, or gave him meetings."

"No proof! I tell you she was always out in the village; what was that for but to give him meetings?"

"Where else should a clergyman's wife be?" inquired Mr Turnbull.

"How can I tell that she was really among the poor people?" said Mr Lawrance sulkily. "She might have been walking with him."

"Of course you must know; you must have been in the village yourself; you must have known whether she was there often or not?"

"Not I, she was there oftener than I was."

Leonie smiled. "I think, Mr Turnbull, if you inquired at Dorchester, you would find that Geraldine did the chief part of the visit-

ing among the poor. Mr Lawrance was rarely seen in the village."

"If that is the case, I can't see that you have any reason to complain that she did it for you. If you left your parish duties to her, no wonder she was often out, and you have no right to suppose from that that she was out with Lord Fitzgermaine. Did you ever see her alone with him?"

"No, I can't say that I did; she took good care of that."

"Did she know much about the people; about their circumstances, and so forth?"

Mr Lawrance would have liked to have denied, or at least evaded, this question, but Lady Lindon's eye was upon him, he remembered that she knew the real state of the case, and replied, "Well—yes—if you come to that, she certainly did know all about them."

"And to do that she must have been much among them."

"Well, I suppose she was."

"Therefore we may consider this part of the question as fairly disposed of as possible, in the

absence of all proof. Now we come to the letters. Have you seen any letters of Lord Fitzgermaine's to her, except the one you read, or of hers to him?"

"No, I can't say that I have, but of course they wrote before; he would never have proposed an elopement in his first letter."

"Have you that letter by you?"

Mr Lawrance drew a crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket, and handed it to his brother-in-law, who read it carefully, and then observed, "If you and Geraldine had not both been too much disturbed to read this carefully, you would have seen that he says, 'I venture to address you now *for the first time!*'"

"Oh, of course," said Mr Lawrance; "and so you believe what he says, do you?"

"This is absurd, Lawrance," returned Mr Turnbull gravely; "why should he tell her a lie, which she would know to be a lie, in a letter only meant for her? How could that recommend him to her? So far from disbelieving him, it would be strong corroborative evidence if your Lordship," turning to Lord

Lindon, "would see Lord Fitzgermaine, and get him to say distinctly whether he ever did write to Lady Geraldine before, or had any interviews with her. If he admits that it was all on his side, I see no reason for doubting his word, as it would be decidedly for his interest to say the contrary."

"I agree with you, Mr Turnbull," said Lord Lindon. "I will see Lord Fitzgermaine to-day."

"All that granted," said Mr Lawrance, "how do you get over the reports? What every one knew and talked of she must have known. It is all humbug her pretending ignorance."

"That, I admit, is your strongest point. How Geraldine overlooked what every one else seems to have seen would be incomprehensible, but that Lady Lindon assures me that the Duke and Duchess of Dorchester were equally blind."

"That is true," said Lady Lindon. "Lord Ernest Fitzgermaine was the only person at the Castle who had the least suspicion of his brother's passion for Geraldine, and he only from hearing it talked of at the Clubs. That

I know for certain. And Lord Ernest himself thought his brother only meant it as a silly passing flirtation, which he would not have thought worth noticing, but that people began to remark it, and it seemed a pity that Geraldine should become the subject of gossip at the Clubs."

"How did the reports first get about, I wonder?" said Mr Lawrance. "There's no smoke without fire."

"That I can easily explain," returned Leonie; "Lady Arabella St Aubyn put them about, being jealous of Lord Fitzgermaine's paying more attention to Geraldine than to herself, on the evening that she and you dined at Dorchester Castle when he was staying there."

"Then did you notice nothing in Lord Fitzgermaine's conduct on that occasion?" inquired Mr Turnbull of his brother-in-law.

"I?—No; I saw he talked a good deal to her, but I never suspected that there was any harm in it."

"If you thought Lord Fitzgermaine talked to her too exclusively, you should have warned

her, and put her on her guard," said Mr Turnbull. "You can't complain of having no opportunity of seeing them together, if you were present at the very occasion which gave rise to the reports. Did Geraldine's manner give you the impression that she was pleased with Lord Fitzgermaine's attentions?"

"Oh, hang it! it's going on for a year ago now; I can't remember whether she was or not."

"Depend upon it, if she had been, your memory would not be so short," said Mr Turnbull drily; "therefore this also is in her favour. We have considered the whole case impartially; I for one can say truly that if I had any bias, it was in your favour. But I am obliged to think that Geraldine is entirely blameless; I cannot even discover that she acted imprudently; her only fault seems to have been her extraordinary blindness, which on one important occasion, at all events, was shared by yourself. It appears to me that the only thing we can do now, is to hear what Lord Fitzgermaine has to say about it. My time is running short; I have an appointment

in the City which I must keep; perhaps if you wish to see me again, my Lord, you will let me have a line to say so?"

"I will, Mr Turnbull," said Lord Lindon, giving him his hand; "and let me thank you for your kindness and patience about this miserable business. There are some other points on which we shall have to consult you; but they had better be put off till after I have seen Lord Fitzgermaine."

Lord Lindon next went to Lord Fitzgermaine, and having by this time recovered his temper, their interview was not distinguished by the stormy excitement of the preceding ones. Lord Lindon's manner, though cool, was so stern and determined, that Lord Fitzgermaine, more than half fearing the results, and seeing that he was not to be trifled with, hastened to exonerate Geraldine completely; writing a paper to that effect, which Lord Lindon dictated to him. He further consented to pass the next twelve months, at least, upon the Continent. Lord Lindon left him, after giving

a significant hint to the alarmed young man, that if it were not that Geraldine's character would be compromised, he should have found much pleasure and satisfaction in shooting him.

With the next day came Mr Turnbull, in compliance with a note from Leonie. Mr Lawrance was already there, and Lord Lindon, after telling them the result of his interview with Lord Fitzgermaine, read the paper aloud.

"This is perfectly satisfactory," said Mr Turnbull, "and, as I said before, I see no reason for doubting his word."

"Therefore, you have nothing to do but to make your peace with Geraldine, for having suspected her," said Lord Lindon, addressing his brother-in-law.

"Not so, Lindon," said Geraldine. "Appearances were against me; I cannot wonder that Mr Lawrance thought me guilty."

"So far from making it up with her," said Mr Lawrance, "I still insist on a separation. All you have said may be very

true; I dare say it is; but every one believes her guilty, and therefore she shall live with me as my wife no longer."

Lord Lindon's eyes sparkled, another outburst was imminent, when Mr Turnbull interposed, saying:

"You can only prove that every one is mistaken, by returning with your wife to Dorchester. You have no reasonable grounds for not doing so, and she has a right to demand it of you."

"I don't care what she has a right to demand; return to Dorchester with her I will not," was Mr Lawrance's reply.

"It is no use arguing after this fashion," said Mr Turnbull, turning to Lord Lindon. "We might waste hours and not settle anything. If you will allow me and my brother-in-law to wish you good morning now, I will bring you his definitive answer to-morrow."

"That will be the best plan," said Leonie, who thought it probable that Mr Lawrance might prove more practicable in a *tête-à-tête*. "I think after a night's reflection Mr Lawrance will find that the less known

and said about this affair the better for him, as much as for Geraldine."

Accordingly the next morning Mr Turnbull came to say that William had consented to return to Dorchester with his wife whenever Lord Lindon pleased, and also that he would take measures for exchanging his living. He did not say what trouble it had cost him to gain these two points; but Leonie guessed it, and thanked him accordingly.

The Lawrances left for Dorchester at the end of the week; at the same time the Lindons, in compliance with Lord Bournemouth's entreaty, proposed themselves on a visit to the Castle, that they might see personally whether Mr Lawrance treated his wife with proper consideration, and did not, at this critical moment, throw discredit on her by not being seen in public with her. The Duke and Duchess were only too thankful to have them to help off the awkwardness of their first meeting with Geraldine and her husband; and, as it proved, it was fortunate that they went. It required all Lord Lindon's stern admonitions, all Lady

Lindon's peremptory remonstrances, to induce William Lawrance to appear anywhere with Geraldine, a neglect which must have excited remark at any time; how much more at this! They had no pleasant time of it at Dorchester; but Lady Lindon was not one to shrink from any duty, however disagreeable, and Lord Lindon was far too fond of his sister to grudge any trouble on her account. Before they left, they had the satisfaction of seeing matters going on more comfortably at the Rectory. The stream of visitors too had diminished; for it was not one of the least of Geraldine's trials, that directly her return was made known, all the neighbourhood called upon her. Various reports had got about concerning her and Lord Fitzgermaine, all differing, all untrue, except on the one point that there had been a disagreement between her and her husband, and every one was penetrated with a laudable curiosity to see how she looked and behaved. It was no small comfort to her to have Leonie's help in receiving her unwelcome guests, and no small annoyance to these to see that stately lady sitting in the

little Rectory drawing-room, and advancing to meet them with the most baffling and disconcerting civility. Before she left, the neighbourhood was beginning to think that really, since Mr Lawrance treated his wife in much the same manner as usual, and since she was as good friends with Lady Lindon as ever, and visited at the Castle as often as she had been used to do, perhaps her conduct had not been as bad as at first supposed.

CHAPTER V.

To mourn a mischief that is past and gone
Is the best way to draw new mischief on.

Alack,
You are transported by calamity
Thither where more awaits you.

VERY different was Mr Lawrance's new parish to the one he had left. In money value it was about the same, but it was situated in a wild bleak part of Glastonshire—as we will call it,—among a wretched and poverty-stricken people, few neighbours near, and those for the most part dull and stiff. Anything more utterly unlike Dorchester, and its well-to-do inhabitants and pleasant society, could scarcely

be imagined. To that sunny Utopia Mr Fitzgermaine now succeeded, it being with him that Mr Lawrance had exchanged; and it may be as well to say at once, that in the course of the year Lady Anne married that devoted son of the Church, to the great disappointment of her parents.

It may easily be imagined that Geraldine did not find this place as much to her mind as Dorchester. It was such up-hill work, and so dreary and dispiriting. She struggled manfully, however, pinched and stinted, and gave money, time, thought, and labour to the people. She tried her influence with the two 'Squires, who, between them, had all the cottages in the village in their hands, but with poor success. Now and then one would mend a hole in a cottage roof at her urgent entreaty; once she received a five-pound note from the other to be spent among his starving tenantry; oftener, if she reported a peculiarly distressing case, their wives would order a basin of soup or gruel to be sent from their kitchens to the sufferers; observing very truly that they should never miss it.

And the people themselves did not trust her. It was no wonder, poor souls! They had been used to see the Squires' wives and daughters come amongst them, spying, scolding, fault-finding, intruding into the cottages at all hours, as if their tenants were their slaves, body and soul. How could they tell that Geraldine was different? She was quiet, it was true, but "so was many a body who hadn't the gift of the gab; sure she was a spy, like all the rest of them." It took months of patient work to get them to listen to her at all, and even then her progress, if progress it could be called, was so slow, accompanied by so many failures, that often she was tempted to doubt whether it was not in vain, and whether she really did any good at all.

If she did little good to them, however, she did much to herself. There are few people who can work steadily, patiently, day after day, for the good of others, without being the better for it themselves. Geraldine was not one of these. She had learnt something at Dorchester; she was learning much at Abbotsbury. Slowly, through doubts and fears and difficulties, she

was fighting her way to a purer faith, a firmer, stronger trust. The work begun for the love of man was continued for the love of God. Benevolence was becoming religion; and the hopeful, sanguine impulses of a young brave heart were exchanged for the calm, firm resolution of the heart that, fearing God, fears nothing else. And Heaven knows she had need of all her faith and trust. The old proverb is a true one which says that

> "A man convinced against his will
> Is of the same opinion still."

Mr Lawrance had been convinced against his will of Geraldine's innocence, and he still believed her guilty—in intention. And so the spell was broken—he had found a flaw in his diamond. She was no longer to him the immaculate noble woman, whose stainless purity and integrity filled him with involuntary awe. She was no longer the incarnation of honour and truth. She, the spotless, had fallen, had fallen!

We have seen that Mr Lawrance's conduct to his wife was at no time particularly good; it now became worse than ever. At times his

irritating, spiteful temper was almost unendurable; all the more so because there was now no external check upon him. At Dorchester he had always felt compelled to put some restraint upon himself in the presence of the Duke or of any of his family; still more in that of Lord and Lady Lindon. Here he seldom saw any strangers; if he did, they were not people for whose opinion he had any value. His brother and sister-in-law were kept closely to London by Lord Bournemouth's failing health; and thus Geraldine was entirely at his mercy. She did not give up, however, trying quietly and firmly to regain the influence she had lost, more for her daughter's sake than for her own. Frederica was now a lively, intelligent child of seven years old—for five weary years had the Lawrances already been at Abbotsbury when we resume our story—very pretty, and very clever. To do Mr Lawrance justice, his little girl had more to fear from foolish indulgence than from severity on his part. He was really and sincerely fond of her; so fond that it might even have made him unselfish as regarded her, but that he unfortunately saw

in her a principal means of thwarting her mother. Everything that Geraldine tried to impress upon the child's mind as good, he would warn her to avoid; everything that Geraldine taught her to shun, he would recommend as good. These contradictions might have been endless, and endlessly hurtful, but that Geraldine avoided coming in collision with him as much as possible, and Freddie had her own manner of settling these differences, and contrived, in the way children alone know how, to believe both parents equally right and infallible. She loved her father, and reverenced her mother; not a usual order of things in a childish mind; but Freddie watched and observed, and, without forming opinions, felt differences.

We need not say how greatly Geraldine loved her daughter. Her very life seemed bound up in her. The more dreary and dismal were her out-door occupations, the more bright and cheery seemed the childish voice and pattering steps that greeted her return home; the more captious and ill-tempered was her husband, the more welcome were

Freddie's caressing ways and loving tones. And then they were so alike! The little loving heart was so like the great loving heart that beat beside it, and from whence it sprung; child and woman were so true and generous and unselfish, of such right good staunch metal! They were a noble pair, that mother and daughter, and Geraldine hoped and expected noble things when her little bud should unfold its leaves, and show all its glory and strength.

Meanwhile she tried to bring her up well, and to counteract the undoubtedly bad influence Mr Lawrance exercised over his daughter. She had good soil to work upon, and she took incredible pains with it; therefore it was not astonishing that good healthy results already began to show themselves.

"Freddie, put your things on, and go out with Marianne, round by the Blackberry Lane, and wait for me at the end of it. I am going to see Sukey Walker, and afterwards we will finish our walk together."

"Why mayn't we begin it together?" said Freddie.

"Because I have settled it differently," was the answer.

Had it been her father, Freddie would have plagued and teased till she found out the reason and overcome it; being her mother, she was aware that she had her answer, and nothing but prompt obedience remained for her. So without further ado she went up-stairs to her nursery, and Geraldine, resuming the cloak and bonnet she had only thrown off for luncheon, proceeded on her way to the cottage. Cottage it could scarcely be called; it was one of a festering heap of hovels puddled together at the end of a lane turning out of the Blackberry Lane. The morning had been wet, but close, and the soaked dunghills and thatched roofs sent up a putrid steam into the heavy air. A few sickly, dirty children were dabbling in the mud; here and there several slatternly-looking women dawdled near them, some scolding the children, some doing simply nothing, and one, with a taller, stronger figure, and rather better face than the others,

carried out a tub of dirty water, and emptied it so recklessly, that Geraldine had some difficulty in getting out of the way in time.

"Eh, is that you?" she said, looking up with a stare, as Geraldine gently remonstrated. "I didn't see ye afore ye spoke."

"I came to ask after the children; I heard the two little ones were dead. Indeed, I am very sorry for you," said Geraldine, hardly knowing how to go on, in presence of the woman's stony face of indifference.

"Ay—the're dead; and Polly's sickening now," was the answer; given less in a tone of indifference than of one which tried to be so.

"Polly! your eldest!" said Geraldine. "Oh, this is terrible!"

Her real hearty sympathy thawed the ice more than any fine speech would have done; and the woman, wiping her eyes with a corner of her apron, continued:

"Ye may well say terrible. Where it'll end I can't tell. She's the usefullest girl that ever was--looks after the young ones—

not that there's many of 'em left now,—keeps the place a bit tidy, cooks her father's taters when I'm out in the field; that girl was working morning, noon, and night, she was. Ah, she was a good girl; never gossiping in the streets, or wasting her earnings in gimcracks; every farthing she brought to me; and 'mother,' says she, 'you take it for the rent, or the baker, or the shop, or what not,' says she. And what shall I do if I loses her? Oh, it's too hard, it is."

Geraldine was silent. The very intensity of her pity made her feel as if everything she could say must sound common-place and dead; and it was with an effort that she remarked:

"The good Lord help you! But as for her, living or dying, she is safe and happy. That must be your comfort."

"Comfort! I've no comfort," the woman broke in. "If she dies—as like enough she will — what shall I and the childer do? And if she lives, it'll be a powerful long time before she gets round again, and

who's to get money for us, while their rascally father's spending every penny of his wages in drink—the beast! I'm sure it's as much as I can do to pay the rent."

"Oh, hush!" exclaimed Geraldine, fearing that the poor girl would overhear her.

The caution came too late; a plaintive voice from within called out, "Don't ye—don't ye, mother, now."

"Don't ye what, Polly?" said the mother, entering the house, followed by Geraldine; "isn't it Gospel truth, every word of it? Don't he go to the Crown every blessed evening and make a beast of himself, drinking away our money?"

"Poor father!" murmured the girl, "he's a hard time of it; don't ye call him hard names, mother. When I'm gone—"

"Ye'll not go, Polly," said the mother; "never fear; we'll get ye round."

"'Tisn't no use hoping," said the girl, "I'm going fast, mother. Don't cry for me; I'm going to be happy; but oh! I'm grieved for you and the little ones!"

"Indeed, indeed, you must not fret," said

Geraldine, much distressed. "I will do all I can for them—and you must trust to God. He has put me here to help you now, and afterwards He will provide."

"Ah, you've a kind heart," said the woman; "if everybody was like you, Polly needn't be sick"—dying, she could not resign herself to say.

"What do you mean?" inquired Geraldine.

"Law bless your dear heart! a babby might see that!" replied the woman. "Look at that there dunghill, stinking under the window of our room, and the roof which lets the rain in on our beds night after night; do you think the poor starving things can look fine and fat like the children of gentlefolks, when they're poisoned by the stench, and their poor little bodies ain't got warmth enow in 'em to kep out the cold?"

"Who told you this?" said Geraldine, well knowing, by bitter experience, that such sanatary truths were far beyond her parishioners.

"Bless you, there was a pedlar body comed round the other day, and mighty powerful he spoke, and showed us the larning of it all.

Ay, he was a sensible body, and a scollard too, and spoke up for us poor folk, and showed us how the rich folk has all the money, and makes slaves of the poor ones,—'but mark you, my friends,' says he, 'our turn's the next. There's a good time coming.'"

"There is indeed," said Geraldine. "If not on earth, yet surely in Heaven. There's a good time coming for your daughter here; there may come one for yourself. Christ died for all, poor and rich."

"Mother," said the sick girl, "I wish you'd listen to Lady Geraldine. She speaks wiser words than the pedlar body; he didn't seem to make no account of God, except that God would avenge the poor man's quarrel, as he called it, but he said nothing of our blessed Lord, who died for us. He seemed so hollow-like."

"That's all very well for a poor creature like you, Polly," said the woman. "As your father says when he's sensible, 'That's all very fine that the parsons and ladies talks, and does well enough for women and children, but

we men, we wants something better than that stuff,' says he, and sure he was right."

Geraldine shook her head slightly, and the girl eagerly endeavoured to interpose, but her strength was unequal to the effort, and Geraldine, seeing her pained look, bent over the bed, and whispered, "It's no use talking just now, Polly; you must pray for her; you can do that."

The girl's face brightened, as her lips moved in assent, and Geraldine, to change the subject, said, "Where did this pedlar come from?"

"From Staffordshire, it was he called it," said the woman, "but his speech was not like the country folk, more mincing and clipped-like. He was a wise man, wherever he comed from, and he showed me the rights of things, as he said."

"He was right enough about the dunghill and the roof, at all events," said Geraldine; "but you must remember that if men do these things, it is God who allows them to do so. They have no power to hurt you beyond

what he allows. Do not think me unfeeling; many a time have I tried to persuade Mr Wilmot that these cottages should be mended, but I cannot succeed. I don't say he is right, as you very well know, but only tell you to look beyond men to God."

"It's easy talking," said the woman, "and I know you won't harm us if you can't help us, but you can't feel as we do. No one can as hasn't lived in these places themselves."

"Your daughter has lived in these places, and she finds it easy practising," said Geraldine. "Don't you think that what makes her so happy might be good for you?"

"Oh, Polly's a poor creature; it's good for the like of her," was the unsatisfactory answer. "I haven't time for them things—there's all the childer to look after, and their bread to get."

Geraldine sighed, but she felt that this was not the time for arguing, and trusted that the daughter's prayers and example would do more than her own precept. She got up and took her leave, promising to send some things

the doctor had ordered, though with little hope that they would be really serviceable. "I wonder how the people in good books manage," she thought, as she walked away. "They convert everybody they come near, and convert by arguing too, which I have always considered to be the most singularly unsatisfactory way of setting to work. No one is able to say a word against their arguments; they chop logic—if even it is logic—and forthwith save a soul, as Leonie once said. While I—I might talk for a week; but I suppose I am unworthy, and yet I feel so zealous! Oh, what a weary, weary struggle it is! But forwards! and God will help me. Those cottages are too disgraceful! If I were only mistress of this estate, what reforms I could work! Ah, hush, Geraldine; be still. You chose this path for yourself—be content in it, and fight manfully for God's kingdom in the sphere which He allowed you to make;—that is your work."

She took out Leonie's last letter, and read it over. The brave, cheerful words roused her

flagging spirit like a trumpet call, and a few tears of gratitude and admiration dropped from her darkening eyes.

"Dear Leonie!" she said, "and her lot is none of the easiest. Waiting on my father day after day, alone in London through all the dead season, Lindon often away—these are difficult things for her to bear. But she never complains, never desponds; staunch, loyal heart, well may Lindon prize you! His marriage has been all in all to him—I never saw any one so improved. And she too, she is improved, softened; it was all she wanted. More noble, brave, generous, devoted, she could not be. What would she do in my place? Not despair, certainly. She would try again and again; one failure would only incite her to fresh efforts. Oh, dear! is it my duty to speak to Mr Wilmot again about those cottages? Four times I have asked him already; he may well think me troublesome! And yet I must. I have not yet found the case so utterly hopeless as to excuse me from further efforts. If my husband would only take some share of these duties! But every

one knows how differently he and I think; he will not conceal it, though I try to do so, and then no one minds refusing me. Oh, it is so weary to work alone! No, not alone—never alone, 'God my Father will not fail me,' and if He is for me, who can be against me? Courage, faint heart! It is but fair to Mr Wilmot to give him one more chance, for truly he takes an awful responsibility on himself. And here he comes. I must do it now—now is the time, and then it will be over."

The gentleman in question came up at the moment, an elderly man, good-looking, and mounted on a fine hunter.

"How do you do, Mr Wilmot? I hope you have had good sport?" she began.

"Excellent! first rate! We had a capital hunting run, and killed near Goodwin's Farm. I met your little girl yonder; surely you are not going to take her to those filthy cottages?"

"No, I am not," said Geraldine, "they are far too bad for her even to pass."

"I wonder how you can go yourself," said Mr Wilmot, "I wouldn't let my wife do so, I know, if I were Lawrance."

"Apparently you don't think them too bad for Robert Smith's wife to live in?" said Geraldine, smiling, "or John Walker's, or Charles Young's—"

"Pray stop," cried Mr Wilmot, "I know nothing of all these names—spare me the beadroll."

"I wish you would spare me the necessity of mentioning them," said Geraldine gently. "Seriously, Mr Wilmot, do you really know how very bad these cottages are? They are not fit for human beings to live in."

"It is not for me to contradict the assertion of so fair a lady," said Mr Wilmot, with a bow.

Geraldine, for the sake of her parishioners, would not show her anger, and interrupted coldly, "I have just returned from John Walker's cottage, Mr Wilmot, where I saw a sight that I wish you had seen too. In one room—the room where husband, wife, and five living children will sleep to-night, lie the corpses of two others; a third may join them before night, for the eldest girl has sickened of the fever. And these deaths are owing,

humanly speaking, to the wretched state of the houses, and the wretched way in which the people are crowded together. I am sure you cannot wish this to be."

Mr Wilmot fidgeted, frowned, bit his lips, and replied, "I can't help the village being crowded. If the people are dissatisfied, why don't they go away, and get a settlement on some other parish? As to the cottages, I did not build them; they were so when my father left them to me, and, for my part, they shall be so when I leave them to my son. No reforms for me. What did for my father's tenants may do for mine."

"They are worse, Mr Wilmot, than when your father left them to you. They were in better repair even when I first came here than they are in now," said Geraldine, quietly. "I have often begged you before to do something for these cottages, and I now beg you once again, though you may justly think me importunate. It is shocking and horrible to see the degradation of these people; and yet how can we expect or hope them to be any-

thing but degraded while the present state of things exists?"

"Oh, for that, Lady Geraldine," said Mr Wilmot, with a loud laugh, "that's the parson's look-out. They must make Christians of the brutes, or what else are they paid for?"

"Believe me, Mr Wilmot, we must Christianize their houses as well as their souls."

"My good Lady Geraldine," said Mr Wilmot, patronizingly, "you've said your say, and uncommonly well too, by Jove! and, as I said before, it's the parson's trade, and they're paid to do that sort of thing. But once for all I beg you to understand that I positively refuse to alter or rebuild those cottages, and do not wish to hear any more about it."

Geraldine flushed all over her face.

"In that case, I have said all I can, and wish you good morning," she returned quietly, and walked on to join her little girl.

It did not surprise her to hear in the course of two or three days that Polly Walker was dead; it did not surprise her that towards the

end of the week Sukey sickened and died too; it did not surprise her that the fever spread to the other detached cottages, and from them to the village. Still less did it surprise her that when matters came to this pass, Mr Wilmot pronounced it unsafe for his children to stay at Abbotsbury, and took them all to Brighton; or that the whole neighbourhood said what an unselfish father and excellent man he was to give up all his hunting on their account; or that when the fever abated, having taken one or more out of every family in the village, the little Wilmots returned, rosy, strong, and flourishing. But we are going on too fast.

Geraldine dismissed the nurse, and returned home alone with her little girl. Freddie was rather whiny; she had become cold with waiting for her mother, and tired too.

"I wish you wouldn't go cottaging," was her first observation. "Father does not."

"Your father wishes me to go instead of him," replied Geraldine, telling a white lie.

"Why so? Because you talk nicelier to the people than he does, mother?"

"Do you think so, daughter?"

The child smiled, then shook her head. "No, not nicelier, only different. Father's talk isn't like yours; it's only very pretty, but strange; yours fits the poor people better. Mother, I should like to talk to the women."

"Talk! you always do talk. I never heard you silent, in a cottage, or out of it."

"Silly!" said Freddie, puckering up her pretty mouth. "I should like to talk such talk as you do, about God and the Bible, you know. Why doesn't father talk such talk?"

"Why does Freddie talk a great deal too much?" said Geraldine, smiling. "Men never talk as much about these things as women; they think."

"But you think, mother? You are thinking when you are so silent, and let your work drop on the table, and cry in your eyes. I think I like you best then; you look so pretty."

"Freddie, you are talking of things you know nothing about," said Geraldine. "Keep that active little tongue of yours rather quieter."

"No, mother, it won't be quiet to-day, it wants to have a run, poor little dear! Mother,

did you ever see any one as handsome as father?"

It was a long time before Geraldine answered, "Your father is handsome."

"You speak cold and quiet, mother; are you thinking of many things?"

"Not of many things; I am thinking of the poor little children I saw just now."

"Winifred and Sally are dead, mother; Marianne said they were; is that why you called them poor?"

"It is the living ones I called poor, and they are poor; the dead ones are happy with God; I don't pity them."

"Mother, when Winifred and Sally were alive, Marianne said they were rude, nasty little things, and when she heard they were dead, she said they had gone to a Better World; she meant Heaven. Do rude nasty children go to Heaven?"

Again Geraldine was a long time silent before she answered, "Yes, Freddie, if they trust in Christ, and try with His help to be good, He will save the worst children."

"Why must they be good?"

"Because Christ wishes them to be good, and to be like Him who was always good."

Freddie's only reply was a grave nod. She did not seem inclined to pursue the conversation, and Geraldine, after considering a little whether to say anything more, decided on leaving her to her own thoughts, having a great dread of inducing her little daughter to express more than she really felt. Presently Freddie cried out joyfully, "Oh, there 's Papa!" and ran to meet him. Mr Lawrance did not look in a good humour; something had evidently happened to ruffle him, and he began as usual to vent his displeasure on Geraldine.

"You're always out of the way when I want you," he said: "where have you been now?"

"Mother has been cottaging," said Freddie steadfastly.

"Cottaging, indeed!" said Mr Lawrance. "I thought I told you before that I wouldn't have the child go about in the parish."

"She did not go," said Geraldine. "I left her in the road with Marianne."

"But I mustn't always be left in the road," interposed Freddie. "Some day, very soon, I shall go with mother and see the people."

"You shall go with me, my dear," said Mr Lawrance, "when I think you're old enough."

"Very well, father, I'll go with you when you think I'm old enough, and I'll go with mother when I think I'm old enough; and that will be to-morrow."

"No, Freddie, it will not," interposed Geraldine. "If your father wishes you not to go, you won't."

"Teaching her to think me a tyrant," muttered Mr Lawrance; then aloud, "You may do as you please, my child."

"Yes, father," said the sagacious little woman, "I always do, you know; but then we always please the same things, don't we? for if I don't agree, you do."

Geraldine smiled. "What did you want me for?" she said, turning to her husband.

"Oh—I quite forgot; there's Johnson in the drawing-room, wanting to know something about the Clothing-club accounts; I told him you kept them all."

Mr Johnson was the curate, a little, meek, hard-working man, with slightly High Church tendencies—Papistical they were called by the Baptist minister—who preached sleepy sermons, with large quotations from the works of "the good Bishop Jeremy Taylor." He and Geraldine managed the parish pretty much between them; though it is only fair to say that Mr Lawrance attended to his duties far more strictly here than at Dorchester.

Geraldine hastened home, leaving Freddie with her father; and for the rest of the afternoon she was immersed in papers and halfpence, and accounts which her aching head rendered it a hard matter to add up clearly.

"I hope I am not going to be laid up," she thought anxiously. "I feel very unwell."

Mr Johnson, good, dull, little man, went on adding up and writing down, without the slightest suspicion that anything was amiss; even when he turned towards her, at the end of his labours, and showed her the result, he did not perceive how ill she looked. He left her, and she lay down on the sofa, hoping her headache would

pass off. It became worse and worse, however; she was obliged to send for Susan, who, without more ado, despatched a messenger for the doctor. He pronounced that she was suffering from an attack of low fever; not a severe one, however, or necessarily alarming; in fact, she might very possibly be well again in two or three days.

"God's will be done," thought Geraldine; "but I did hope that He had sent for me to go home."

CHAPTER VI.

Lorn Mother, at the dark grave door
She kneeleth, pleading o'er and o'er,
But it is shut for evermore.

She toileth on, the mournful'st thing,
At the vain task of emptying
The cistern whence the salt tears spring.

* * * * *

The spirit of life may leap above,
But in that grave her prison'd dove
Lies, cold to the warm embrace of love.

* * * * *

Ah, God ! when in the glad life-cup
The face of death swims darkly up,
The crowning flower is sure to droop.

GERALD MASSEY.

To die be given us, or attain!
Fierce work it were to do again;
So pilgrims, bound for Mecca, pray'd
At burning noon: * * *

So pray all
Whom labours self-ordain'd enthrall,
Because they to themselves propose
On this side the all-common close
A goal which, gain'd, may give repose.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

IT was not so, however: in two or three days, as the doctor had said, Geraldine was about again, rather weaker than before, but otherwise well. She had barely recovered a fortnight, when Freddie sickened, and her attack promised to be a much more severe one than her mother's. Oh, how Geraldine nursed her, and watched by her; how she prayed day and night for her daughter's life, hoping, like David, that God would yet spare the child! We cannot go over all the details of her illness—of what use would it be? for Freddie died, died fearlessly and hopefully, trusting with the whole of her childish heart on the Lord who died for her.

As soon as Leonie heard of her death, she left her husband with Lord Bournemouth, and went to Colnbury, rightly judging that her presence would be needed there. Mr Lawrance's despair was fearful to witness. All day long he sat in his chair by the fire, without speaking a word to any one, and at night would roam out into the fields, and never returned till day had broken, and the labourers were beginning to go to their work. To Lady Lindon, who arrived two days before the funeral, he was simply morose, to Geraldine often fearfully violent, ascribing the child's death to her, and saying that if her self-will had not made her go into those pestilential cottages, all would have been well. This reproach had little effect on her; she knew she had only done her duty, and had other things to think of than his cruel and unjust words. Her grief, though less obtrusive, was beyond words deep and bitter. At first it was comparatively easy to say, "Thy will be done," and to feel thankful for the sure and certain hope she had of a joyful resurrection for her daughter; then

afterwards, when the little body was buried, and her daily life was perforce obliged to return to its old outward forms, how desolate and dreary was the blank! Sometimes her heart seemed dead, and incapable of feeling any more, and then the next hour the pain came back so sharp and bitter!

Leonie, who alone guessed, though she could not know, the extent of her misery, doubted if she would ever get over the blow, if time would bring any healing to her. Occupation wore and tormented her, she longed for quiet hours of meditation in which to set her soul in order, and look her sorrow in the face. But this was impossible; the fever had spread to the whole village; every house had its dead and dying, and she only was there to give help and consolation. Every moment of the day was spent in going from cottage to cottage, and at night she was too wearied for thought, and sunk at once into the heavy, dreamless sleep of complete exhaustion.

And now another trial awaited her.

Mr Lawrance took the fever in its worst and

most aggravated form. To any one he would have been a disagreeable and captious patient, but to Geraldine he was almost unendurable. Like most men with excellent general health, he was exceedingly impatient and fretful when ill, could not understand it, and thought no one had ever been so miserable as he was. This is common to many men, but, added to this, Mr Lawrance had remarkably little fortitude, and not the slightest wish to spare his attentive, thoughtful nurse any trouble or anxiety. That when he became worse he made up his mind that he should die, was not perhaps extraordinary under the circumstances. For Geraldine, who had stood by the dying bed of her Christian daughter, it was a fearful thing to watch her husband, devoid as he was of peace or faith or hope; devoid even of the common courage which induces most men, however worldly, to put a good face on their fears, and meet death so as not to shame their manhood. It was a positive relief when he became delirious, for then she had only physical responsibility laid on her, and not the awful feeling that it was his

personal dislike to her which made him so averse to hearing the truths of religion from her lips. She much wished that there had been some clergyman near whose age and character would give him weight enough to have influence with her husband, or that he had any friend likely to be of use, to whom she could apply.

Meanwhile Mrs Lawrance, whose infirm state of health confined her to her house, wrote by every day's post to ask "tidings concerning the state of William's soul," which epistles Geraldine could only answer in the most unsatisfactory manner. But because her letters were not couched in the peculiar phraseology of the sect to which Mrs Lawrance belonged, because she would not indulge in fruitless lamentations touching his "unenlightened condition," or indignation at the "hardness of his heart," because she said that she could only pray, and trust that God would be merciful, and expressed a hope—prompted by Christian charity—that his life might yet be spared, therefore Mrs Lawrance was pleased to think her careless, and "indifferent to her hus-

band's awful state." Nor did she scruple openly to express her opinions, to assure Geraldine that if William's soul were eternally lost, it would be owing to his unfortunate marriage with a worldly, frivolous, and unenlightened wife, and that she had hoped better things from a woman whom it had pleased the Lord so recently to afflict. Poor Geraldine, worn and weakened with watching and nursing, overworked in every way, and barely recovered from her own illness, wept floods of bitter tears over these letters, and had no spirit left to do anything else. She felt, however, that it was wrong to give way to useless sorrow, and knew how unjust and ungenerous were such reproaches. "God is more merciful than man," she said, and dried her eyes, and set herself to write answers, humble and gentle, and giving such little encouragement as in strict truth she could.

And it fell out as Geraldine had hoped and prayed; Mr Lawrance's illness took a turn for the better, and he was presently out of immediate danger, though a relapse was much dreaded. And now his fears returned in all

their strength, and reached such a height that the doctor told Geraldine it was absolutely necessary to still them, as a return of fever, a fatal return, would probably be the immediate consequence.

"But what can I do?" said Geraldine; "nothing I can say has the slightest effect. Oh, if there were only some good clergyman near, who would have some influence over him, and on whom I could rely!"

"I know you have done your best," said Mr Steele, who had seen so much of her lately, and been her companion in so many scenes of sorrow, that they had become in some sort intimate. "I wish I could help you. But there is a great lack of good clergymen in these parts. I don't know though;—the Rector of Abbot's Mead has gone for a holiday, and in his place has come a man of whom they speak very highly. I can't tell you what his opinions are—you know I know nothing of those things—but he is very charitable and hardworking, and stints himself, I suspect, to give away, and that is more than can be said for any one else hereabouts."

"True," said Geraldine, thoughtfully. "But have you seen him yourself? do you know what sort of a person he is? It would be very disagreeable if he were a man we neither of us liked, as he must become intimate to a certain degree, if called in on such an occasion."

"Well, what else can you do?" returned the Doctor. "I tell you one thing, Lady Geraldine; there is no chance for your husband's life, unless his mind is set at rest. Put the case before him, and if he likes to see the gentleman, why, it's his business."

"That would be the best way," said Geraldine; "what is his name?"

"His name? I almost forget. It's rather a fine one too. By the bye, he was Rector here once. That was before my time though, so I don't know him; well—Fitz,—Fitz—Fitzgermaine—that's it. The Reverend Frederick Fitzgermaine was on his card."

Geraldine started and coloured. "Mr Frederick Fitzgermaine! he is Rector of the place Mr Lawrance had before he came here. I know his wife very well. Is she with him?"

"No; he said something about his wife

being delicate, and these hills being too cold for her. She is staying at her father's house in London, whoever he may be."

"He is the Duke of Dorchester," said Geraldine, absently.

She was considering whether it was advisable to renew a connection with any of the Fitzgermaines, but the urgency of the case seemed to warrant her doing so, and Lady Anne's absence removed any real objection.

"I wish I knew what to do!" she said doubtfully, "he is very High Church."

"High Church or Low Church I know nothing about, but I believe him to be a good Christian," said the Doctor. "However, your ladyship must settle it as you please. I must be going; I will look in again as I return this evening."

Geraldine continued in great perplexity as to what she should do. Her chief trouble was Mr Fitzgermaine's opinions, which almost verged on Romanism; but it seemed wrong to exclude him on that score, when he might be the means of doing much good. She believed him to be a really good man, and reproached herself with narrow-mindedness.

"I have always been tolerant of differences of opinion, even of doctrinal errors, as long as they are errors in good faith, so why should I hesitate?" was her question; but hesitate she did.

At last she decided on taking Mr Steele's advice, and, putting the whole case before her husband, be guided by his wishes. To her surprise he expressed the greatest eagerness to see Mr Fitzgermaine, and desired her to send for him at once.

"I knew him at college," he said. "He was a good fellow, older than I was, and serious, and all that, you know."

So Geraldine at once despatched a note to Mr Fitzgermaine, which in the course of a couple of hours brought that gentleman to her husband's bedside. He was good-looking and gentlemanlike, with thoughtful eyes, and a face that seemed to bear the traces of fasts and vigils, a quiet manner, and very pleasing voice, having the appearance of more delicacy than strength, both of mind and body. That he should have captivated an enthusiastic girl like Lady Anne could surprise no one; that he

would gain any influence over a man like her husband seemed to Geraldine more than doubtful. She was mistaken, however; Mr Lawrance listened eagerly to all he said, and appeared to agree with him. Indeed, the prospect he held out of being able to merit salvation through a future course of good works was peculiarly agreeable to a man of restless habits, who was only anxious to be up and doing, and to atone for past neglect, and who could scarcely believe, much less realize, the possibility of the free gift of salvation. He was so eager to begin the new course of life he proposed to himself, that Mr Fitzgermaine with difficulty restrained him from observing fasts, as the only good work now in his power. Geraldine was almost terrified at the confidence he placed in the young clergyman, and began to feel as though she had been the means of calling up a spirit which was about to become unmanageable; and even Mr Fitzgermaine himself, much as he talked of the trust which ought to be reposed in the Church as represented by her clergy, seemed to find the trust so unexpectedly reposed in himself some-

what of the most embarrassing. He was a good and morbidly conscientious man, and an honourable and right-minded gentleman, who would have thought shame to use any undue influence, or assert any greater authority than in his opinion fairly belonged to him. The excessive tenderness of his conscienee, joined to the weakness of character which made personal responsibility a burden too grievous to be borne, had driven him into extreme High Church opinions; but with the inconsequence natural to him, he was terrified at any one else surrendering their soul into his own hands with the entireness which, in his own case, he had pronounced to be right and necessary. Besides, as a chivalrous and high-principled gentleman, it grieved him to see Geraldine so completely and insultingly set aside; he could not but feel that he had acquired all the influence which rightly belonged to her, and that since he had entered the house she was made of less account than ever. He remonstrated more than once, but without effect; it was easy to persuade Mr Lawrance that he ought to visit his parishioners, give away in

charity, write his own sermons, &c., but not so easy to persuade him that he ought to treat his wife with common consideration and courtesy. Like most people, he was ready enough to do anything which did not go too much against his inclination, but nothing else. On the whole, Mr Fitzgermaine did not take that pleasure and satisfaction in his penitent which gentlemen of his opinions are apt to do, and found the charge so distressing and embarrassing that he was not sorry when his term of leave unexpectedly came to an end, owing to the dangerous illness of the clergyman who had undertaken his duty.

He looked out for a substitute at Abbot's Mead, and presently found one to his mind, a Mr Eustace Whitmore, the same person who had induced him to adopt his present views, and whom he earnestly entreated to visit Mr Lawrance.

Geraldine, after Mr Whitmore's first call, could have dispensed with his society, as she felt an indescribable repugnance to his appearance and manners. But Mr Lawrance was still more taken with him than with Mr Fitz-

germaine, and with some reason, for in everything but honesty and straightforwardness he was undoubtedly Mr Fitzgermaine's superior. Things went on from bad to worse. As soon as Mr Lawrance left his room, he began the course of good works to which he had been looking forward with such impatience. Fasting was one of the first, and this, acting on a frame already weakened, excited his nerves to such a pitch of irritability that Geraldine really began to fear lest his mind should give way. In vain she entreated Mr Whitmore to interfere; he merely said, in calm reproof, that he wondered Lady Geraldine should wish to undo what had been accomplished with such difficulty, or should weigh the welfare of his miserable body against the salvation of his eternal soul; adding that if Lady Geraldine had a more dutiful submission to the Church, she would see that any course prescribed by that Holy Church's ministers was likely to be far more judicious and efficacious than the fallacious efforts of individual self-will; — an answer which was far from satisfactory to poor Geraldine, and which sufficiently showed the

spirit by which Mr Whitmore was animated.

So her husband was not only encouraged to continue the fasting, but to begin visiting the poor, and doing duty far sooner than he ought to have done, and far oftener than his strength allowed. Often, when he entered a cottage, he was so exhausted that he was unable to speak, scarcely to listen, and gave the idea of his being indifferent and neglectful. Where he had expected to do great good, he was unable to make the slightest impression, and the disappointment preyed on his mind, rendering his spirits still more unequal, and his temper more irritable. But out of all this evil there came good. Geraldine could not see him so utterly wretched, so broken-down and miserable, disappointed in all his best efforts, and failing even when sincerely desirous to do right, without deep pity and compassion. She tried to comfort and encourage him; she helped him in all his schemes as far as she was able, and endeavoured by every means in her power to fill up the gulf between them. And he was in no condition to reject affection and sympathy

from any quarter; so that it might in time have vanished altogether, but for Mr Whitmore's influence.

It happened one day that Mr Lawrance proposed to observe one of the fasts of the Church, and at the same time to walk to a distant outlying hamlet of his parish, and visit a child ill of the fever. Geraldine, in great alarm, endeavoured to dissuade him, and at length prevailed so far that the fast was partially given up, and he consented to let her drive him to the place in the pony carriage. Mr Whitmore heard of this, and in his eyes it was a "presumptuous and self-willed innovation." He called on Mr Lawrance, and strongly urged the danger of attending to his wife's solicitations, whom he represented as a well-meaning person, but neither zealous nor earnest, full of notions of speculative liberty, and entirely wanting in that reverence for the Church and submission for her chosen ministers desirable in a good Churchwoman. Mr Lawrance, alarmed, renewed his system of good works with more energy than ever, and fearing each day that he endangered, if not forfeited, his

salvation by some omission, he each day increased the list of duties to be done, till, but for a very vigorous constitution, he must have paid the penalty of his rashness by the loss of his life. He became less violent, but far more gloomy than before, and would sit whole evenings, his head resting on his hands, without speaking a word.

It occurred to Geraldine that if Mr and Mrs Turnbull could be prevailed upon to pay them a short visit, it might enliven him. She wrote to them accordingly, but Mr Turnbull's business kept him in London for the present, and Emily did not like to leave her husband. Then she proposed to Mr Lawrance that they should go up to London and visit his mother, whom they had not seen for a year; but he rejected this proposal with horror, and said that she could go if she liked, but as for himself, he had too much work on his hands to think of leaving at present. Of course Geraldine would not hear of leaving him, and so they staid in the country, and went on in a very unsatisfactory and uncomfortable manner.

CHAPTER VII.

It is jealousy's peculiar nature
To swell small things to great; nay, out of nought
To conquer much: and to lose its reason
Amid the hideous phantoms it has found.

YOUNG.

And she does little deeds of kindness
With such soul-cheering happiness,
You would think that by hearsay only
She knew of the world's distress.

And save when the jarring heart-string
Is touched by a heedless word,
You never would dream that sorrow
Had broken a single chord.

HOOD.

ABOUT two months after these things had happened, Geraldine was one evening awoke

from her sleep by hearing a noise in her room, and opening her eyes, saw her husband making his way to the door. She listened, and presently heard him go along the passage to the door of what had been the nursery, open it, and go softly in. Much astonished, she sprang out of bed, threw on her dressing-gown, and quickly followed him. Her bare feet made no noise on the floor, and it was not till she stood beside him that he was conscious of her presence. He was staring stupidly around him, as if suddenly awakened, and indeed Geraldine at first thought he had been walking in his sleep.

"William!"—it was the first time she had called him so for four years,—"William, what are you looking for? what do you want?"

"The child," he said; "where is she? where have you put her?"

"What do you mean? what child?"

"Your child, Freddie; where have you put her? she was crying—you have hurt her—you have killed her—where is she?"

And he seized his wife's arm, and shook her violently.

Geraldine, greatly alarmed, had yet presence of mind enough to say, "You have been dreaming, William. You forget. Come back to bed; you will catch cold."

He allowed her to take his hand and lead him back, though casting doubtful glances at her all the time. It may readily be supposed that Geraldine did not sleep much for the remainder of the night. However, her husband slept quietly till the morning, and when he awoke seemed to have entirely forgotten the whole affair. Of course she took care not to remind him of it. She thought much about it however, but at length succeeded in persuading herself that it was merely a case of sleep-walking, and, as for the next ten days nothing happened to arouse her suspicions, remained happy in that conviction.

One morning, while she was still finishing her breakfast, Mr Lawrance got up from the table, and said he was going out. He had been unwell all the morning, having taken a chill, and Geraldine noticed a certain wildness and brilliancy in his eyes, which she attributed

to the fever attendant upon cold. She succeeded in persuading him that the weather was too bad to attempt it, and he established himself by the fire, with the "Theologia Germanica" in his hand, and a volume of Manning's Sermons at his elbow. When a couple of hours had elapsed, he was decidedly worse, and Geraldine, growing uneasy, wrote for Mr Steele, who, on arriving, strongly recommended Mr Lawrance to go to bed. This he refused to do, and on being urged became so excited, that the Doctor privately advised Geraldine to say nothing more about it. He gave her directions as to what course she was to pursue, and promised to send some medicine in the course of the afternoon.

"I am going on my rounds at once," he said on leaving, "is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes; if you see Margaret Lane, I should be glad if you would call in on your way back, and tell me how she is, and whether I can send her anything. I shall not be able to go so far to-day."

"Very well; I'll be sure to remember."

He left, and Geraldine returned to her husband, whom she found still sitting by the fire, with a pen in his hand, and some blank sheets of sermon paper before him. In a few minutes he laid down the pen, passed his hand over his forehead with a confused, wearied look, and said he could not think of anything; all his ideas were gone. She advised him to let it alone, saying that there was still plenty of time, and another day his head would probably be clearer. He consented for a short time; then the thought of the unwritten sermon seemed to worry him, he declared that he wanted to get it done, and it was worse to leave it than to go on with it. Geraldine came and looked over his shoulder, and after reading the text suggested a few leading ideas, then put them into words, then gently took the pen out of his hand, and wrote them down. Now and then he would make a suggestion, though even this seemed to be an effort, and at last the sermon was finished.

He threw himself back in his chair, shut his eyes, and she hoped he was going to

sleep, when, to her great vexation, a ring at the door-bell was heard, and "Mr Whitmore" was announced. That indiscreet gentleman, heedless of her hints that Mr Lawrance was fatigued and unwell, and of her efforts to turn the conversation, insisted on entering into a discussion concerning the use of pictures in churches. He was all in favour of it, Mr Lawrance's feelings went strongly the other way, and he entered into the discussion with eagerness, becoming fearfully excited as Mr Whitmore appealed to the Fathers, and quoted authority after authority, hunting him up and down in the argument, and driving him into corners, whilst Geraldine sat by in alarm, vainly endeavouring to moderate their ardour. Right glad was she when the visit was over; and Mr Whitmore walked away, congratulating himself on the skill he had shown in arguing, and on the impression he was making on poor Lawrance, who really seemed to take a great interest in all these matters, and with whom he might be able to do great things but for that foolish commonplace wife of his.

With the foolish commonplace wife the afternoon wore away wearily enough; her husband continued so strangely excited that she began to be terrified, and felt glad she had asked Mr Steele to call on his way home. The day had been rough and wild; towards evening a heavy storm blew up, the rain came down in torrents, with a fierce driving wind, against which it was almost impossible to make head. At eight o'clock Mr Steele called, drenched through, himself and his horse thoroughly knocked up, and altogther in so miserable a plight that Geraldine could do no less than offer him a bed, which was thankfully accepted. He was struck with the alteration in Mr Lawrance since the morning, and, while talking to Geraldine, kept watching him in a way which caused her great uneasiness.

They went to bed early, and no sooner was she alone with her husband than he resumed the question he had been debating with Mr Whitmore, adducing several new arguments that had occurred to him since, but all in so excited and extravagant

a manner, that, after several attempts to calm him, she was obliged to beg him to be silent, saying she was too tired to hear what he had to say. He complied, but for a long time afterwards she heard him muttering to himself. At last he dropped asleep, and Geraldine, thoroughly exhausted, also fell, much against her will, into a heavy doze.

And the storm raged fiercer and fiercer, the wind came in gusts against the house, till, with a loud crash, several panes of glass fell in. Then Mr Lawrance, awaking with a wild, fearful shout, sprang up, and turned upon his wife.

"Where is she? You have murdered her! Give me Freddie—you have killed her! you have killed her!" And uttering loud screams, he sprang upon her with both his hands round her throat.

Fortunately for her, she awoke at once with all her senses about her; and lying perfectly still, though her face, even to her lips, was ashy white, fixed her grave, fearless eyes calmly on him, and replied, "Be

quiet, William; you are dreaming. Let my throat alone, and lie down."

He stopped, put his face close to hers, gnashed his teeth, and shrieked out, "I will kill you! You have murdered her; where is she?"

Geraldine stretched out her hands and rang the bell, still keeping her eyes fixed on him. He seemed stupified, and fascinated, till, hearing steps along the passage, he gave one final gripe, which left her senseless and to all appearance dead, sprang out of bed, and hid himself under it.

The door opened, and Mr Steele hurried in, closely followed by Susan, bearing a candle in one hand and a poker in the other. She ran up to the bed, crying, "Eh, here's murder! My Leddy's dead; murder! murder!" and taking Geraldine up in her arms, sought to see if any life remained.

Mr Steele, who knew better what to expect, shut the door, and standing with his back against it looked about for Mr Lawrance. He presently saw that the bed was

the only place where he could have hid himself, and assuming a tone of authority desired him to come out. He repeated the command two or three times, and presently a rustling was heard, and Mr Lawrance crawled out on his hands and knees, looking very foolish, but perfectly quiet, and, with the cunning of madness, bent on persuading the Doctor that it was Geraldine who had tried to kill him.

"She is very queer, Steele," he said; "I've thought so for a long time, and to-night, just as the window fell in, she sprang up, and tried to strangle me. Madness gave her wonderful strength, and in the struggle I fear I may have hurt her, poor thing; quite unintentionally, of course. You will look after her, and see she has everything she requires. I fear I must get a keeper for her; I have put up with her eccentricities for a long time, not wishing to say anything, on her brother's account; but now it is really not safe."

All this was said in a perfectly cool and collected tone, and, but for the expression,

half wild, half idiotic, of his eyes, no one could have supposed him to be out of his mind.

"Why did you hide under the bed, Mr Lawrance?" said the Doctor, curious to see what he would answer.

"I saw she was beginning to come to herself, so I rang the bell, and then hid; for as the sight of me seems to excite her, I feared it might further unsettle her mind."

"Very true," returned Mr Steele; "we had better leave her to the maid, and you come with me."

As he turned to Susan to give her some directions concerning Geraldine, who was just recovering, the madman made a rush for the door. The Doctor quickly placed himself before it, and Mr Lawrance, seeing that all was discovered, sprang upon him. But he fell back, frightened and trembling, as Mr Steele fixed his eyes steadily upon him, and then, becoming more manageable, suffered Susan to lead her mistress past him, and out of the room.

Geraldine, though terribly frightened, ex-

hausted, and hardly recovered from her fainting fit, felt that this was no time to give way, and, dressing herself as quickly as possible, ordered the pony carriage to be made ready, and in half an hour's time was driving herself to the neighbouring town, in order to send a telegraphic message to Mr Turnbull, desiring his presence immediately.

This done, she bethought herself whether she could find any man to come home with her, and help her and the Doctor in the care of her husband. The only person she could think of was Mr Whitmore. As a clergyman, there was nothing singular in requiring his services on any occasion of sickness, either of mind or body, and as she could not but think he had had a large share in bringing about this special state of things, it seemed to her fair that he should take some of the danger and trouble incidental to it.

He was naturally much astonished to see her drive up to his house at four o'clock in the morning; but as it happened that he had intended to start for Town by an early train, she found him up and dressed. He was very

much shocked at her account, and very willing to give up his business, and do anything in his power to help her. He was no coward, and was more occupied with grief for the miserable state of his promising convert than thought of the danger he might possibly incur. Being a powerful man, with nerves of iron, and a self-possession which never failed him, he proved a valuable assistant to Mr Steele, and as the day advanced they contrived between them to quiet the patient.

As for Geraldine, she remained down-stairs. Her presence irritated her husband; and directly it transpired that he had gone out of his mind, the two under-maids declared that "they should be afeered to stop in the 'ouse, that they should," and went off together, leaving her and Susan to clean the house, cook the dinner, and finish the family washing, which had been begun the day before. Her London apprenticeship stood her in good stead, and they got through their work quickly and well. At five o'clock everything was finished, and as she sat down to rest the door opened, and

Lord Lindon walked in, followed by Mr Turnbull.

"Turnbull came to me as soon as he received your message, and we agreed to come down together. I am very sorry! But what is the matter? We could not conceive from your message what had gone amiss. I thought Lawrance was well again?"

Thereupon Geraldine had to explain the whole matter.

"Thank God you are safe!" said Mr Turnbull. "But something must be done immediately. He must have the best advice. Dr —— is considered one of the first authorities for these cases; do you not think so, Lord Lindon?"

"You know better than I do. But I believe Dr —— will not leave Town at this time of year. What shall we do? You say he is raving?"

"We must consult the Doctor who is attending him," said Mr Turnbull. "He will know best what to advise."

The result was that Mr Lawrance was taken

up to London; but the decided opinion of the physicians who were consulted was that his case was incurable. It was not merely mental excitement, but disease of the brain, and had been coming on for probably a year before the fever, which, with Mr Whitmore's subsequent follies, brought it to a crisis. It would have been impossible for Geraldine to live with him, even with a keeper constantly in the house; in fact, after trying that plan for several weeks, during which her life was more than once endangered, it was found absolutely necessary to place him in a private asylum.

So she was again reduced to beggary, hopeless this time; Mr Turnbull paid the sum required for her husband's support, and she returned penniless to her father's house. However, Lord Bournemouth, in compassion for the situation to which she was reduced, and at Leonie's earnest entreaty, consented to leave her, on his death, the fortune originally designed for her. Meanwhile he paid her the interest of it, and this sum, though very small, was sufficient for her wants when living in her father's house.

Though thankful for these arrangements, she was well aware that her life would be far more really painful now than before. Circumstanced like a widow, yet not a widow, she would be a constant subject of speculation to her father's guests; indeed, if these, owing to his infirm state of health, had not been very few, the position would have been too painful to be endured. Her home broken up, no positive duties, forced to lead, as it were, the life of an unmarried daughter in her father's house, no real ties, no one especially belonging to her, her old place filled up by her brother's wife; all this was very trying at first to one accustomed to an active, responsible life, as the mistress of a house. She did her best to make herself useful to her father, and brother, and sister. In one way she was of the greatest service to them. Now she was there, they were able to leave Town sometimes, and Leonie's health, which had suffered somewhat from her London life, benefited greatly by the change of air and scene. And with the aid of the clergyman of the parish, she discovered poor people whom she could visit and relieve,

and schools where she might teach. These things, together with the visits which she paid twice a week to her husband, filled up her time tolerably, and she was surprised at finding so much to do, in a situation that had seemed so unpromising.

CHAPTER VIII.

Or is she not my star?
Where is my star—my star?
Second Voice. She is sad for thee;
All things grow sadder to thee, one by one.
E. BARRETT BROWNING.

Oh will you eat
No grapes, my royal fox? yes, but you will;
My noble grapes, an if my royal fox
Could reach them.—SHAKESPEARE.

Laughter is mad, and reckless mirth,
What does she in the weary earth?
Should wealth or fame or life employ,
Death comes our labour to destroy.
CURRER BELL.

IT was rarely that Geraldine went into society, her visiting being entirely confined

to a very few intimate friends. She had neither inclination nor time for gaiety, nor in her position could she have indulged in it without remark. But it happened that in the middle of this season there came to London a celebrated *ex-prima donna*. This lady,—for lady she was in every sense of the word,—whose beautiful voice commanded as much admiration as her beautiful life did love and reverence, had recently married, and returned to the scene of her former triumphs in the character of a private person rather than of a *cantatrice*. She did not sing at the Opera, or at public concerts; at private ones she sometimes consented to appear, but only as a private performer, and to oblige people who were old acquaintances, and had befriended her in less prosperous days.

To one of these parties Geraldine was invited as well as the Lindons, and they pressed her to go. She was much tempted, for she knew and liked the great singer well, and wished to see and hear her again. The party, too, was to be very small, and very exclusive; in consideration of which she yielded to her

brother's entreaties, and consented to go. Nor did she regret having done so. She found Madame Lucie in better voice than ever, and as charming, fresh, and unspoiled. The company was very pleasant, and between the songs Geraldine found much quiet amusement in talking to her own friends, or watching the different people who came and went by her chair. Among all the others, one lady particularly attracted her notice. She was young, evidently married, beautifully dressed, and very handsome. She was tall, very thin, with a very pale—a white face, features like a marble statue, and soft glowing black eyes, like an Italian's. It presently appeared that the lady was far from Italian in temperament; she was the calmest, most passionless, and we must needs say, the dullest of English women. Her manners might have been pleasing but for their excessive coldness, her voice, which was sweet and low, never rose or fell a tone; she had a flow of small-talk, fashionable, insipid, and monotonous. As she moved away, Lord Lindon came up to his sister, and catching the lady's eye looked a little startled, a

little vexed, and returned her cold bow by one as cold.

"Well, what do you think of her?" he said, turning to Geraldine.

"She is handsome," said Geraldine; "who is she?"

"Lady Fitzgermaine."

Geraldine started, and coloured, saying, "So, *il s'est rangé*. You know her?"

"A little," said Lord Lindon, "and such a bore she is! Accomplished within an inch of her life, and thinks of nothing but her music and drawing, and her pretty face. Pretty indeed! a death's head's as pretty."

"Come, she is undeniably handsome. Lindon, does she—did she ever—I mean, did he ever—"

"Tell her? Nothing. We knew her before she married, therefore we left cards on her, and she on us, and there it ended. I fancy she is astonished that we don't ask her to my father's house, and has questioned Fitzgermaine pretty closely about it. But you may be certain she has got nothing out of him."

"Who was she?" said Geraldine.

"A Miss Clara Paget, fourth daughter of a Lancashire squire. She had not a penny of fortune, but being the beauty of the family was brought up to London on spec, by a match-making aunt. And uncommonly well it turned out. She picked up the ways and manners of the world quickly, got into good society by reason of her face, Lady St Aubyn declared she was beautiful, Lady Somebody else said her air was high-bred, and her singing divine; it became the fashion to rave about her, and the end of it all was she married Fitz-germaine."

"He might have done worse," said Geraldine. "She looks good-tempered, and, as I said before, she is certainly very handsome."

"She was handsome enough when she first came to London; not as handsome as you were, or as Leonie is; still not amiss. Now she is gone to skin and bone; he bullies her, I suspect. Where's Leonie? Do you want to go home yet?"

"I don't; nor, I think, does she," said Geraldine.

"Not she, I'll be bound," said Lord Lindon,

looking towards his wife, who was talking in the midst of a circle of admirers. "Doesn't she look beautiful?" he continued, after watching her for a few moments; "I think she grows handsomer every day."

"Indeed she does," said Geraldine, "and the best of it is, she is so unspoilt. One word from you is worth more to her than all the compliments in the world. But then she is so much above the usual standard of women. There is no one here to be compared to her, either for beauty, talent, or intellect."

Lord Lindon looked exceedingly gratified, as Geraldine's praise was generally very calm and moderate. But this evening she had been particularly struck by her sister-in-law's great superiority, mentally and physically, and spoke as she felt at the moment.

"I see they are asking her to sing," she continued.

"I suppose no one else will or can do so after Madame Lucie. Go and ask her for that Italian Barcarolle she was practising this morning; it suits her voice exactly."

And as Lord Lindon went off, Geraldine

thought with a smile, "Who would have expected you to become such a devoted husband?"

Meanwhile Lady Fitzgermaine walked slowly through the rooms, looking for her husband. He was not to be seen, and she went on, stopping every now and then to talk to one or other of her friends, with the same sweet smile, and the same unchanging flow of common-places for every one. On coming to the last room of the suite, a small dimly lighted boudoir, she found Lord Fitzgermaine by himself, extended on a sofa, and fast asleep. This of course was neither right nor polite; besides, she was tired, and wished to go home, and dared not do so without telling him first. So she awoke him.

"Come, Fitzgermaine; I am going home."

"Well, go then; ask Little to get the carriage for you."

"Are you not coming?"

"Not with you; I am going to Pratt's; there, go away, and leave me alone."

"I shan't leave you alone," she replied, in her sweetest voice. "You are really too rude. What would Lady Grenville think if she saw

you? I dare say you have not heard a note of the music, and Madame Lucie has been outdoing herself."

"Why don't you stay to hear her, then? You were anxious enough to come, and I dare say you won't have another opportunity," said Lord Fitzgermaine, becoming more civil as he woke up.

"She has gone away, and Lady Lindon is going to sing, I think. By the bye, a sister of Lord Lindon's is with her, Lady Geraldine Lawrance, a very pleasing person she seems,—not pretty."

"Not pretty? what's to prevent her being pretty?" broke in Lord Fitzgermaine abruptly.

"Dear me, how extraordinary you are!" said his wife, quietly. "As if every one was born pretty."

"She was born pretty, if ever a woman was. What does she look like? I tell you what, Clara; I'm not going home yet; come and take a turn through the rooms with me; and when you go, you shall set me down in St. James's Street."

Lady Fitzgermaine was so tired she could

scarcely stand, having already remained far longer than her strength warranted, in order to please her husband; therefore she answered, "I am so tired, Fitzgermaine. I will go home, and send back the carriage for you directly."

"Nonsense; what has tired you? You have not been walking to-day. Come along—we shan't be five minutes."

Very quietly, without the least trace or shade of annoyance, she took his arm, looking very pale, and, as the five minutes lengthened to ten and fifteen, rather frightened; which Lord Fitzgermaine, in his eager pursuit of Geraldine, did not observe.

It must not be supposed that all this time he had cherished a secret and romantic passion for Geraldine; on the contrary, he rarely thought of her, and then only as of a woman whom he used to admire; sometimes wondering how he could have been such a fool as to break with the Lindons about her, and whether the shooting was as good at Avonbury as it used to be. When he returned from the Continent, he determined to marry, thought Miss Paget the prettiest girl he had seen for a long

time, and found little difficulty in persuading her to accept him. Since then he had been passably wearied of her society, and now it occurred to him that Geraldine had never wearied him, and that somehow she had always contrived to amuse him when least amusable. He found out where she was sitting, and, placing himself near, began to talk to a friend of his who had just been talking to her. He was considerably startled at her worn, sad face, even though it was now lighted up with interest and amusement. She looked ten, fifteen years older than when she last saw him, and bore the unmistakable traces of sorrow and anxiety. Her beauty was entirely gone, so entirely that many people could not believe she had ever possessed any. These observations were not made in five minutes, or in ten; and presently, as Lord Fitzgermaine still stayed and looked, his wife said, in a quick trembling scared voice, "I must go, Fitzgermaine."

"Oh, stay a minute or two longer," he said, without looking at her, "I'll come directly."

Meanwhile Lord Lindon came back to his sister with Leonie, and seeing Lord Fitzger-

maine standing close by her, with no apparent intention of moving, proposed to her to go home. They left accordingly, and then Lord Fitzgermaine, turning to his wife, said he didn't care if they went now. She moved forwards a step or two, pale as death; then he felt her weight heavier and heavier on his arm, and she sank, and would have fallen on the ground in a dead faint, but that he caught her, and carried her to a sofa.

"Good God! what have I done!" he exclaimed, as he looked bewildered at her pale lifeless face; "it's all my fault;—I have killedher!"

"Not so bad as that, my dear fellow, I hope," said Colonel Little, the gentleman to whom he had been talking. "I will fetch some water, and she will recover presently."

Water was already at hand; everybody having run for it at once, at the report that a lady had fainted. A window was opened, and the water being plentifully sprinkled over her face, she, as Colonel Little had said, presently began to recover. She was terribly frightened, and clung to her husband, imploring him in trembling child-like tones to take

her home at once, which he was ready enough to do.

While this was going on, the Lindons and Geraldine were driving back, chattering over the party, and discussing everybody and everything.

"You're looking brighter now, Cherry," said Lord Lindon. "Half an hour ago you were more like a corpse than a living woman."

"I was very tired at one time," said Geraldine; "the rooms became hot. Lady Fitzgermaine looked very ill too."

"Oh, she? she always looks ill. But as for you, Cherry, I'm sure you want change of air. What do you think, Leonie?"

"I think you want to go away, and are determined to make it out a charity to Mina. Why don't you go?"

"I don't want to go," said Lord Lindon; "it's all the same to me where I am. Only I thought Geraldine wanted change."

Lady Lindon considered, and, seeing that her husband had set his mind on leaving London, thought it best not to oppose him.

"She will be all the better for it; so suppose you and she go for a trip, and I will stay and take care of Lord Bournemouth."

"No! no! no! Leonie," said Geraldine. "That will never do. That will be putting us all out of our places, and upsetting everything."

"How so, pray? We can't all go; and you and I can't go, and leave Lindon alone with his father; and so the only plan is for you and him to go together. Don't hesitate; it will be as great a charity to him as to you."

"You will be so dull, and I can't bear to leave you alone."

"Me? I am never dull; and I am well used to being alone, as Lindon can tell you."

"She always knows what to do with herself — which is more than I do," said Lord Lindon. "Come, Cherry, we have only to settle where we shall go, and for how long."

"Take a return ticket to Brighton from Saturday to Monday, like a couple of citizens,"

said Geraldine, laughing. "Seriously, Lindon, you forget that I can't leave London."

Leonie knew that she was thinking of her husband, and immediately said, "You have nothing to do in London which I cannot do equally well, for a few weeks at least. I will go to —— for you regularly twice a week, and send reports."

"You need not do that," said Geraldine sadly, "once a week will be quite often enough. I should not go oftener, except to satisfy my conscience. But we need not talk about it, for I must stay. I can't bear to run away from my duties."

"If you don't look out sharp, your duties will run away from you," observed Lord Lindon, "for you will soon be too ill to do them. Come, — you have fairly earned a holiday, and you will be all the fresher afterwards for it."

"Haven't you learnt yet," said Leonie, smiling, "that when Lindon and I have settled a thing, there is no appeal? You must go for a month, at the very least;—there is another point fixed; and now I

will graciously allow you to decide the whereabouts for yourself."

"Wherever Lindon likes," said Geraldine. "Sea or land, I am ready for either."

"Ah—sea," said Lord Lindon; "don't I wish I could keep a yacht! Such a cruise as we would have! You should see places and things you never even dreamed of! Sights to last you a lifetime."

"You may see that without a yacht," said Leonie. "Suppose you take two months, and go abroad?"

"Oh no, I can't leave England, and I can't be away more than a month at most. Let us go to Wales or Scotland, or the north coast of Devonshire. I have longed to see Clovelly, ever since there was that delicious picture of Clovelly sea wall in the Exhibition. I could feel the sea breezes blowing in my face."

"I've a fancy for Devonshire too," said Lord Lindon; "I could amuse myself well enough for a month or two there. But if you want to see a sea, the West coast of Ireland's the place."

"I like the idea of that too," said Geraldine. "Oh, dear me! I am like a child who has to choose a treat for its birthday! It gives me the old schoolroom feeling of a holiday again! I shall think of it all night, instead of sleeping. Don't let us settle directly; it is so delightful to feel that all England is before us to choose from."

Lord Lindon laughed; Leonie smiled sadly. It seemed to her very sorrowful, this delight in a holiday in a person as young as her sister. And she, who had been brought up among the islands and seas of the West Indies, could scarcely realize anything in England giving intense pleasure. Pretty it might be, but nothing more; though she felt a kind of curiosity to see what Geraldine looked forward to so much, and what Lindon, who had seen everything that was to be seen in Europe and in North and South America, considered worth revisiting.

Geraldine, notwithstanding her protest, could not help settling for Devonshire that very night. They were to go in a week; it being considered impossible to prepare Lord Bournemouth's mind for their departure in less than that time,

and not advisable to prolong their stay beyond it, when once the plan had been broken to him.

"Geraldine," said Leonie that evening, before they went to bed, "you must tell me to-morrow about your schools and classes and poor people and things; I have a mind to see whether I can't turn school-mistress as well as others."

Next morning, when Geraldine was busily occupied in initiating Leonie into the theoretical mysteries of the said schools and classes, Lady St Aubyn called, bringing with her the latest piece of fashionable gossip. "Lady Fitzgermaine has been prematurely confined of a little girl. She is very ill, and the child very weakly."

And in the afternoon, the news was changed to, "Lady Fitzgermaine is dead, and the baby is not expected to live."

CHAPTER IX.

Down the pale cheek long lines of shadow slope,
  Which years and curious thoughts and suffering give.
Thou hast foreknown the vanity of hope,
  Foreseen thy harvest, yet proceed'st to live.

TRENCH.

That pleasure, as it came, even so departs,
  But duty, life's true star, doth fixed remain.
This lesson, graven on my heart of hearts,
  This from thy converse is my latest gain.

Before she married she was blest—
  Blest in her youth, blest in her worth :
Her mind was calm, its sunny rest
  Shone in her eyes more clear than mirth.

TRENCH.

GERALDINE's anticipations of a pleasant holiday were not disappointed. It proved even

more charming than she had dared to hope, and her delight in the sea and the scenery was a source of endless satisfaction to Lord Lindon. They made expeditions almost every day, either by land or by sea, and every day she grew stronger, and more able to enjoy them. It was no trifling relief to be freed from the burden of those ghastly visits twice a week to the Asylum; and Leonie sent her such good reports of Mr Lawrance, and such flourishing ones of the poor people and schools, that she could be under no anxiety on their account. So she gave herself up to unrestrained enjoyment, and was out of doors all day long, from sunrise to sunset, revelling in beauties she had never had the opportunity of seeing before.

One day, while walking with her brother by the sea shore in the early morning, she noticed a lady and gentleman in deep mourning at a short distance. There was something about their air and manner that she thought she recognised, but their faces were turned from her, so she could not ascertain if she really knew them. Lord Lindon was busy planning an

excursion for the day, and she could not get him to look round. Presently the lady dropped her parasol, and, as she hastily turned, Geraldine beheld the face of Lady Anne Fitzgermaine.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Lord Lindon, "there's Frederick Fitzgermaine and his wife! We must speak to them, Cherry."

Geraldine, who had no very pleasant associations with either of them, would have been well pleased to have passed them with a formal bow; but that was impossible, so she came forward with as calm a manner as she could assume. Lady Anne was very nervous, but Mr Fitzgermaine was so genuinely unembarrassed and pleased to see her, that it was evident he did not connect himself, as Geraldine could not help doing, with her husband's lunacy.

"We are here for Anne's health," said Mr. Fitzgermaine, in answer to Lord Lindon's questions; "she required change, and as I can take my holidays better now than at any other time, we settled to come here together."

"It is so pleasant," said Lady Anne, plaintively; "I so rarely have Mr Fitzgermaine's company if I leave home. He is so devoted to the parish that this is the first holiday he has taken for three years."

"There are few clergymen who can say as much, I think," said Lord Lindon. "Lady Anne, you should persuade him to leave oftener."

"Lindon is a great person for holidays," said Geraldine, smiling: "he insisted that I wanted to die, and has brought me here accordingly."

"I am very glad," said Lady Anne. "I shall see something of you now. I have been longing to see you."

Geraldine scarcely knew what to answer. She could not hold out great hopes of seeing Lady Anne often in future, as nothing could be more undesirable than a renewal of the intimacy with the Fitzgermaines, especially after Lady Fitzgermaine's death; so she remained silent, feeling very awkward. Lord Lindon filled up the pause by saying, "We shall be sure to meet often here, and, as a beginning,

I hope you will come back with us to breakfast. Our table is very small, but I think it will hold two more."

Geraldine, who remembered that the tea was coming to an end, the marmalade was just finished, and only two eggs were brought daily from the farm-house a mile and a half off, could not think that this hasty invitation mended matters, and was not sorry to hear Lady Anne say, in the same plaintive tone, that she was afraid she was too tired to accept Lord Lindon's invitation, but that if he and Geraldine were likely to be in about five, she and Mr Fitzgermaine would come and call upon them. This plan was amended by an invitation to dinner, which was at length accepted, after Lady Anne had appealed several times to her husband to know if she should not be too much tired, and he had several times replied that he did not think so, but that, if she was, perhaps Lady Geraldine would be kind enough to excuse a short notice of the fact. Geraldine of course assented, and they separated.

"That's a remarkable change," said Lord Lindon, as they walked away. "You and I remember her as fine and strong a girl as one would wish to see, and here she is with all the manners and customs of a confirmed invalid."

"In her best days she had never much spirit," said Geraldine, "and gave in sooner than any one I ever knew. Mr Fitzgermaine is the last person I should think fitted for the care of an invalid wife, and yet on the whole he seems to thrive upon it."

"Thrive!" said Lord Lindon, "I don't know what you call thriving, but I do know that there's not an ounce of flesh on his bones. Perhaps that's your idea of thriving."

"I get on pretty well myself without a much larger allowance," said Geraldine, smiling. "But what I mean to say is that he has more decision, his face has a firmer expression, and not the old crushed look I remember so well. He is more manly, and less priestly."

"It seems to me as if all my old friends

were dying, or becoming invalids," said Lord Lindon abruptly. "This is a weary world, Cherry, after all said and done."

Geraldine smiled, a sad, sweet smile.

"Ask Leonie if she finds it so; ask Mr Fitzgermaine if he does."

"I should prefer to ask you," said Lord Lindon, "you ought to be a good judge."

"If my lot has been unfortunate, I cannot blame the world, as all I have suffered has been the direct consequence of my own faults. No, Lindon, the world is a good world enough, if we only act our part manfully in it, heart within and God o'erhead."

"That's all very well for good people like you and Leonie—and, I suppose, Fitzgermaine also. But for me, I must confess it's dreary work now and then to look back, and see how many have dropped off, and how many are following them as fast as they can. Here's a letter I had this morning from a man in the ——, stationed at the Cape, telling me of the death of young Reed. You remember him—he was in London the year you came out; he had just got his commission then. And now he is

dead; picked off from behind a bush by those rascally Caffres, not even killed in fair fight. Well, the regiment has lost such an officer as it won't see again in a hurry. What a fine fellow he was, to be sure! A soldier every inch of him, and so clever."

"And he is dead!" said Geraldine. "I remember thinking him the manliest and most original boy I ever met. Peace be with him. If all the reports of him are true, there is little doubt where he has gone."

"I should think not," said Lord Lindon. "He was too good for this world, that's a fact. Our ancestors knew what they were about when they invented that saying. How words of his come back to me now, which I never thought of at the time he said them. He was the only really religious man I ever knew who never disgusted me with his goodness."

"He seems to have brought it before you too little," said Geraldine, smiling, "since it needed his death to enforce his words."

"I remember something he used to say," continued Lord Lindon reflectively, "about a

man's work being his religion, which struck me at the time, for it was so unlike what we heard when you and I were young, Cherry. Do you remember the times when we used to be sent to visit Grandmamma because my father and mother were too much bored, by the clergymen she always had about her, to go? There were one or two we were sure to find there. How well I remember sitting on a stool by the fire, listening to their talk, and wondering why God sent us into the world if our only business was to get out of it again as fast as we could; and why it was put in the Bible, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread," if all time given to work and business was only so much stolen from Heaven, as they seemed to think? I do believe those men first gave me a disgust for religion; though I liked well enough to hear Grandmamma talk about it, poor thing! I once asked one of them whether the good people were to shirk the work, and live on the fruit of the bad ones' labours."

"Did you?" said Geraldine. "I never

heard of that. I was impertinent enough to them, but I never should have ventured as far as that. What did he say?"

"Boxed my ears in a fit of holy wrath, and said I was a child of Satan; to which I replied, that my tutor called me a good boy when I learnt my lessons, and a bad one when I didn't, and I should be glad to think he was wrong. Of course Mr —— told me to do what my tutor desired, and I concluded the argument by remarking that I supposed one's profession or trade was the sort of lessons one did when one was grown up, and that a religion must be—all rot, I think I said—which was hindered by it. To which precociously expressed opinion I still adhere."

"Major Reed's was not, from all I have heard," said Geraldine; "his profession was most truly his religion. He was my beau ideal of a soldier."

"The sight of men like him really makes one wish to be of some use in the world," said Lord Lindon. It's a strange thing to see a man live for nothing on earth but to do his

duty, but a fine thing too, I think. At least I should think so if all my good friends were not such poor creatures."

"There's the mistake you make," said Geraldine; "you have seen a few poor creatures, as you call them, and you think that religion is a poor weak-minded thing, instead of being the bravest and noblest and manfullest thing in the world."

"How you look!" said Lord Lindon, turning round to her; "one thing is certain, religion does not make you poor in the weak-minded sense. There is some good in talking to you; you don't go off like a rocket at every word one says."

"Certainly I have listened in silence to one or two queer speeches," said Geraldine, smiling; "sometimes because I thought them true, sometimes because I did not know what to say, and sometimes because, though I did know what to say, I hoped you would find out the answer for yourself in time—a far better thing than having it told you."

"You take it very coolly," said Lord Lin-

don; "suppose I die before I have found it out?"

"I don't think you will. When I was younger, and first began to think about these things, I used to be in a sort of fever to 'convert' all my friends; now I have learnt to wait in faith, knowing that God who loves them does better for them than I can. If He pleases to make me the instrument of their conversion, well and good; the opportunity will come in His good time. Meanwhile I can always pray for them."

"That sounds like sense," returned Lord Lindon, "and religion too, and very like something poor Reed used to say. Poor fellow, what trouble he took with me at one time. He gave it up latterly, finding it didn't do, I suppose. After all, there must be some truth in it; every one is meant to work, and can find something to do, if he choose; though what mine is, I'd be obliged to any one who would tell me. It's almost a satisfaction to think that I must stay in London, and look after my father, instead of going to the moors like other men."

"You are right," said Geraldine; "that is one evident part of your duty. What the other is, I can no more say than yourself at present, but if you look for it you will find it, be sure. There are the tenants in Glastonshire; they would be none the worse for looking after, I suspect."

"Oh, there it is! the old story! Every unfortunate eldest son is told to go and look after the tenants now-a-days! What can I do with them, pray? As to their cottages and all that, I have no power to do anything, for my father would never stand my meddling with them, and as to anything else—you know as well as I do that I'm the last person who could do them any good. No, let ill alone; it's the only thing to be done with them."

"That is a hopeful, manly maxim," said Geraldine. "However, I grant that your field there is particularly small. Nevertheless I can't help wishing that when you and Leonie next leave London you would go there for a time. Trust her tact and sagacity for finding employment for herself and you too."

"Well, we'll talk it over with her, but it's a

horrid bore. Why wasn't I a younger son with a profession? The army would have suited me to a turn."

"Because you were better fitted for an eldest son, I suppose, though truly you are not acting up to your vocation. You laugh at Lord James Manvers, and all the young England set, but their activity shames your laziness."

"I have heard you object to their plans and theories yourself, many a time."

"They may be mistaken—that is another question; but one thing is certain, they do their best as far as they know how; whatsoever their hand finds to do, they do it with their might."

"And let me suggest that what your hand shall find to do now, or rather your head—is ordering dinner; and then both our heads shall lay themselves together and settle where we will go to-day. Shall we have a drive, or a sail?"

"A sail, by all means," said Geraldine, who knew this to be a hint that her brother had had enough of the conversation. "I can drive any day in London. You must help me to

order dinner, for, what with your particularity and Mrs Pott's inefficiency, it is not an easy matter."

"We should have done better to have brought a cook," said Lord Lindon.

"It would not have been worth the trouble. Mrs Potts does well enough for me, and for you too, if you will allow me to judge. As to Mr Fitzgermaine, he is not a man to be fastidious about eating, and you may depend upon it Lady Anne won't come."

And Geraldine's conjecture was right. Punctually at eight o'clock Mr Fitzgermaine appeared, without Lady Anne. He was very sorry; up to the last moment Anne had fully meant to come, but a bad headache came on, and so forth. By his manner he was a little vexed, and seemed to think that his wife might have made the effort; however, if such were the case, he speedily forgot all about it, in the pleasure of meeting Lord Lindon and Geraldine. He had a real regard and admiration for her, and her brother had been one of his most intimate College friends. In spite of great

difference of character and opinions, they had always got on extremely well together; Lord Lindon being as much attracted by Mr Fitzgermaine's refinement and learning as the other was by his friend's social, careless ease, and knowledge of the world. They could each give the other something —the true secret of friendship.

"I am sorry Anne seems so ill again; I heard she was quite well," said Geraldine.

"She was pretty well, but poor Clara Fitzgermaine's death was a great shock to her, and threw her back. I hope the sea air will quite set her up. She seems better already."

"We must make some expeditions together, if she is strong enough," said Lord Lindon. "There are plenty of places to see about here, and a good party is half the battle in this sort of thing."

"I shall be delighted; but you must tell me what we ought to see. We only came two days ago, and scarcely know our way about yet. You are old inhabitants, compared to us."

Thereupon Lord Lindon entered into an account of all he and Geraldine had seen, and what still remained to be seen, and the discussion about excursions, and everything therewith connected, continued till Geraldine ended it by leaving the dining-room.

After she had gone, Lord Lindon said, "You were talking about Lady Fitzgermaine's death. What a sad business it was! I never was more surprised in my life, for I saw her only the night before at a party."

"It was that party which did all the mischief," returned Mr Fitzgermaine; "and the worst part of the business was that Fitzgermaine urged—almost forced her to stay till she fainted."

"Indeed? I never heard of that before. How did he get on with her? does he seem to miss her?"

"He misses her very much, and at first I never saw any one more miserable than he was. They got on very well together; she was such a sweet temper, no one could help liking her. Sometimes I used to fancy

she was not much of a companion to him, but I saw them very little together."

"Ah—not a companion? She had not much in her, I suspect."

"No; quite the reverse. It was a pity, for he required some one with intellect. A clever wife would have done a good deal for him. But she was a particularly amiable, unselfish person, and all the family liked her very much, though at first the Duke disapproved of the marriage."

"I dare say; the connection was not likely to please him. Is the child living still? it was born alive, I believe?"

"It is still living, but very sickly. It has been sent to her mother's, as Dorchester did not seem to suit it, and her people were very anxious to have it. Poor Clara! she begged with her last breath that the baby might be sent to her home. I remember seeing it once when I was in Lancashire, a wild, dreary place enough, but she was very fond of it."

"What will become of Fitzgermaine?" inquired Lord Lindon.

"He is going abroad again, and does not mean to come back for a year or two."

"And Ernest?"

"Ernest is with his regiment at the Cape, getting on very well. If you look in Thursday's 'Times,' you will see he is mentioned in the last despatches."

"I always said there was something in that fellow," said Lord Lindon, reflectively, "only he has such a gift for hiding it. My little brother is going out to the Cape, and I am heartily glad of it. He was getting rather sick of his profession."

"And he had his commission!—when?"

"Well—only three years ago; but he has been dawdling about in country quarters ever since;—enough to sicken any one, I should think."

"How old is he?—not old enough for that yet?"

"He is twenty-one; and half a head taller than you, and twice as broad. He has grown up more of a man than I expected at one time, and made considerable havoc in the hearts of susceptible young ladies, during the

month he was in London last year, the young puppy! We respectable married men are sadly cut out by the boys now-a-days, though I stick to it that a man 's worth nothing till he 's five-and-twenty. Eh, Fred?"

"Oh, of course," replied Mr Fitzgermaine, laughing, "though, if I remember right, we thought pretty well of ourselves when we were at Oxford."

"Not you—you never could be persuaded to think half enough of yourself. I hope the trick hasn't stuck by you. How are you getting on at Dorchester?"

"Very fairly. Of course there are checks and disappointments there as everywhere; still, on the whole, it is a satisfactory place—almost too much so, I am afraid."

"Always hunting after difficulties? What kind of giant would suit you now? Can't you be satisfied where you are?"

"I hope so. But I suppose, if a man could choose, he would always prefer a difficult work to an easy one."

Lord Lindon opened his eyes, but Mr Fitzgermaine's quiet manner did not seem to in-

dicate that he had meant to say anything out of the common.

"And I have a fancy that you do not see the English peasant as he really is at Dorchester. There is none of that grinding, crushing poverty that exists in other places, and has so large a share in forming the character."

"I dare say. Rather like a moral greenhouse, in fact. It always struck me as being that sort of place, little as I know. Geraldine is the person to talk to about these things. And that reminds me that she will be wondering why we don't join her, and thinking the clergy a dreadfully dissipated set. Shall we go to the drawing-room?"

Mr Fitzgermaine assented, and on joining Geraldine they found her reading at the tea-table, and rather astonished at their non-appearance.

"The fact is," said Lord Lindon, "Freddy has been starting such very extraordinary ideas that I scarcely know at this moment whether I stand on my head or my heels. What do you think of his having an ambition to cope with 'crushing, grinding poverty?'"

"Not in my own person, Lady Geraldine," said Mr Fitzgermaine, with a smile.

"In that of your parishioners then? Am I to conclude from that that you preferred Abbotsbury to Dorchester?" she inquired, with a faint flush.

He hesitated. "You are a good guesser;—I think I could be well content to return to Abbotsbury."

"Much better stay where you are," quoth Lord Lindon.

"Your being there is a sign that you ought to be there, I suppose; as I read in some book the other day—and an uncommonly clever book it was too. And I thought you were an admirer of the picturesque? what did you find to attract you in the Glastonshire hills?"

"They are ugly enough, and bleak enough, certainly; and yet I liked them."

"Liked them! why?"

Mr Fitzgermaine smiled slightly, and merely answered, "You at least should not abuse them, as I understand the sporting is good."

"Good hunting, but indifferent shooting. I've often hunted over those hills from Avonbury, which is about twenty miles off, as the crow flies. Did you get any shooting when you were there, Freddy?"

"No, I had no opportunity, and no time either. The parish is a very large one, and very much scattered—it was tolerably hard looking after it."

"And very much neglected," said Geraldine. "They tell me the Hill clergymen are much improved of late years, and from all accounts there seems to have been need of it. I understand that the former incumbent of Abbotsbury used sometimes to appear in the pulpit with a black eye, being addicted to boxing."

"It is to be hoped that manners are mended in those parts," said Lord Lindon; "Freddy must have been a considerable change for the natives. How did you get on with them?"

"Not very well, which was my own fault, though it was very up-hill work. But I think I might do better now, with the experience I then gained."

"'Never say die!' Well, that's the right

thing," said Lord Lindon. "They must be a bad set if you and they couldn't agree."

"I have already said that it was my fault, and not theirs," said Mr Fitzgermaine quietly; "but one learns better and more quickly from defects than from victories, perhaps."

"What do you think my sister has carved out as a pleasant little place for me? To go to Avonbury, and look after the scoundrels there."

"Well?" said Mr Fitzgermaine.

"Well! did you ever hear such a plan in your life?"

"I think you can't do better."

"And why, pray? But I might have known you would be against me."

"Of course; is it not your proper place? Were you never taught in your childhood that you are to do your duty in that station of life unto which it has pleased God to call you?"

"On the contrary—I am learning it in my old age. The genius of the century is decidedly against idle gentlemen! Shall I give a lecture in the school-room, supposing there is one,—a point about which I am by no means clear?"

"First build your school-room, and then give your lecture—if you can."

"Well, I must find something to do, I suppose; as you all seem to think so, Leonie and I will toddle down and take a look at the old place. What will you bet that I turn out a model landlord some day?"

"I shall lose my bet if I make one—which I shall not, for I really think something may be made of you after all, notwithstanding your laziness," said Mr Fitzgermaine, smiling; "always supposing your good intentions don't die away before you have a chance of carrying them into effect. I hope you will keep him up to the mark, Lady Geraldine."

"Trust her for that," said Lord Lindon. "But, in any case, I don't think they will be so easily effaced."

In fact, the question of what to do with himself had been pressing rather heavily on Lord Lindon's mind. He was beginning to tire of his unoccupied life, more especially since Geraldine had come to shame him with her ceaseless activity. He knew that Leonie utterly disapproved of his idleness, and only

refrained from speaking strongly about it because she knew it would be useless. Many months ago, circumstances had brought Major Reed and his sayings and doings strongly before his mind, and now of course the impression was increased tenfold by his friend's sudden death. Benevolence was a very striking feature of his character, and when he heard the plans of his "Young England" friends for bettering the condition of their tenants he too longed to be up and doing, though restrained by a feeling that Avonbury was a very hornet's nest to meddle with, and that he who put his hand to the plough there must not turn back. It was difficult and disagreeable to make a beginning, especially with his father's known aversion to innovations. However, he could always go down there, and, as Geraldine had said, trust to Leonie to find work for herself, and for him too.

And Geraldine?

Geraldine, when her guest had gone, went to her room, sat down by the open window, and thought over all the conversation carefully, then fell on her knees, and prayed long

and earnestly for the brother who was never forgotten in her prayers night and morning. She prayed that the good time might indeed be coming for him; and then rose up, and standing by the open window, where the moonlight streamed on her face, and the sea breezes blew fresh through the room, whispered to herself, "Wait, I say, on the Lord."

CHAPTER X.

Spring it is cheery,
Winter is dreary,
Green leaves hang, but the brown must fly:
* * * *
Wither'd and shaken,
What can an old man do but die?—HOOD.

The strongest plume in Wisdom's pinion
Is the memory of past folly.—COLERIDGE.

"FREDDY FITZGERMAINE is certainly very much improved," was Lord Lindon's remark, as he and Geraldine sat together at the breakfast table. "I always said there was good stuff in him, which would come out some day. I like

him amazingly—always did. But as for my Lady Anne, she appears to be in process of washing out."

"There is plenty of salt in his character, and little or none in hers," returned Geraldine. "She should have married a Duke—not a Social Reforming Duke either—and had a fine old Castle, and money, and all the rest of it. She would make a very good show duchess, to sit at the head of a table, beautifully dressed, and look handsome. Did you see her children yesterday? There are three of them—such beautiful little things! It makes an old woman of me to see Anne Fitzgermaine, who was just out of the school-room when I came to Dorchester, going about with three children after her!"

"Not much of that, either. I suspect she lies on a sofa, and lets the nurses go about with the children. I did see them and spoke to them yesterday, and it was all 'Papa was going to do this,' and 'Papa taught them that,' and was going to take them to one place or another."

"She used to be very fond of children," said Geraldine. "I should have thought she would be a most devoted mother. Perhaps her health is really worse than we think."

"Not a bit of it—Freddy humours her too much, you may depend upon it. But hallo! —what 's this?'

The door opened, and Mr Baxter, Lord Lindon's very respectable and very authoritative valet, entered the room, with a face of lively concern.

"Most extraordinary thing, your Lordship; most unpleasant," he began.

"Well?" said Lord Lindon.

"Never had such a thing happen since I've been a servant, my Lord."

"Well, what is it? Let us hear it," exclaimed Lord Lindon.

Mr Baxter, for his only answer, pulled a parcel out of his pocket, and unfolding it, displayed two dozen silk pocket-handkerchiefs of the most gorgeous colours.

"Those are my handkerchiefs, I believe," observed Lord Lindon, mildly.

"Dear me, Lindon, what frightful ones!" interposed Geraldine.

"They are your Lordship's handkerchiefs, and your Lordship will be surprised to hear that I saw them hanging up in a pawnbroker's shop-window this very morning."

"Scarcely surprised, Baxter," said Lord Lindon, still more mildly; "I met an old lady in a donkey cart at the door the other day, very considerably intoxicated, and was told she was the washerwoman. I suppose it was through her agency that my handkerchiefs got into the pawnbroker's window."

"I am sure they had better have stayed there," observed Geraldine.

"Your Lordship has guessed correctly," said Mr Baxter pompously. "What steps would you wish me to take to prevent a recurrence of the annoyance?"

"Take the handkerchiefs away first, Baxter; and then you may do whatever you please. It 's all one to me."

"May I not dismiss the female, my Lord?" demanded Mr Baxter.

"Just as you please, only take the handkerchiefs away," said Lord Lindon, yawning.

Mr Baxter gathered up the handkerchiefs and departed, looking unutterable things, and murmuring that no doubt a good temper was a very desirable thing, but gentlemen might be too easy, and that, if it was not for him, he doubted that my Lord would not have a coat or a shirt to his back in a week's time.

"I like to astonish Baxter," observed Lord Lindon; "he always expects me to go into such a frenzy over trifles."

"I wish those hideous handkerchiefs had never been recovered," said Geraldine. "What in the world made you buy such things?"

"I don't know—they're not so bad, are they? Very likely Baxter bought them; he generally does all those little things for me. Here he is again. Well, Baxter—what is it now? Are all my shirts at the pawnbrokers? Get them out—there's my purse on the table."

"No, my Lord; your shirts are not at the pawnbroker's *yet;* but there's a person come

from the Telegraph-office at —— with a message for your Lordship."

"Eh—what — a telegraph? Give it here," exclaimed Lord Lindon, stretching out his hand.

It was from Leonie—"Come at once, if you wish to see your father alive. He has had a fit."

Geraldine burst into tears; Lord Lindon read the message over twice, and biting his lip hard, caught up "Bradshaw," and began looking out trains to London.

"We can get there to-night, if we catch the evening express at —," he said. "Baxter, get us a car, and put up a few of my things."

In a quarter of an hour's time he and Geraldine had started, leaving Baxter to settle everything, and follow with the rest of the luggage by the next train. They arrived late in London.

"How is Lord Bournemouth?" inquired Lord Lindon of the porter.

"He died an hour ago, my Lord," was the answer.

Lord Lindon ran up-stairs, Geraldine follow-

ing. He hurried to his father's room. The curtains round the bed were drawn close, except on the side where Leonie was sitting.

"You are come too late," she said. "He is dead. He had not strength to rally after the fit. He knew he was dying, and spoke once to thank me, and tell me to give you both his love."

Lord Lindon wrung her hand, which he held in his, so hard that she could scarcely bear the pain, and walked to the window.

Geraldine's sobs, as she fell on her knees and buried her face in Leonie's lap, were the only sounds heard. Leonie bent over her, gently stroking her hair, but did not offer any words of comfort, which she knew would be uselessly tormenting.

Presently Lord Lindon returned from the window, and Geraldine rose, and putting her hand into his, like a little child, they went to the bed together, and looked on the face of the dead. Calm, stern, sad, but very grand withal, was it, all the high-bred beauty of his line showing in the old man's face as it had not done for many a long day. All trace of pain

was gone; the face, so lately worn with disease, was now still and quiet in its marble pallor.

"I think he is happy, Geraldine," whispered Leonie; "it is difficult to tell—he did not say much, only a word or two—but I think so."

Geraldine's sobs ceased, and she dried her eyes.

"Thank God for that!" she whispered, and the two women left the room.

Lord Lindon remained alone with his dead father. He had heard the whisper, though they had not meant him to do so. Happy! gone to God! had he too died in that faith which they professed? Was he himself the only one who would not join them hereafter? The idea was inexpressibly dreary. "The Lord have mercy on me!" he said—the first prayer that had crossed his lips for many a year.

Then the thought came, "He has had mercy on me—He has it still. What is the fact of my being still alive but mercy? Thirty-two years of life has He given me already for His service—and I have given them to the Devil! What has all my idleness and extravagance

and self-indulgence been but the Devil's work, and doing the Devil's service? I will be different—I will try and do some good in the world before I die—so help me God! He has taken from me the easy duty with which I satisfied my conscience, and given me a far more difficult one—let me do it to the best of my powers. 'Forgive us our trespasses—deliver us from evil'—there must be some meaning in those words which my nurse used to teach me. And if there is—they are for me as well as for every one else; He is my Father in Heaven as well as all the world's!" He knelt down, and repeated the Lord's Prayer—it was the only one he knew—slowly and earnestly, and remained kneeling long after it was finished. "Father, I thank Thee!" he said at length, as he rose up.

And Geraldine, sadly weeping in her own room, did not know yet that her prayers had been answered.

CHAPTER XI.

Yet they, believe me, who await
No gifts from chance, have conquer'd fate.
They winning room to see and bear,
And to men's business not to hear,
Through clouds of individual strife
Draw homewards to the general life.

M. ARNOLD.

Thus we, beloved, in our safe recess,
Did evermore abroad the voices hear
In the great world of sorrow and distress,
With pity heard, yet us they came not near.

TRENCH.

* * * her laugh, full of mirth, without any control,
But the sweet one of gracefulness, rung from her soul;
And where it most sparkled no glance could discover,
In lip, eye, or cheek, for she brighten'd all over,
Like any fair lake that the breeze is upon,
When it breaks into dimples and laughs in the sun.

LORD LINDON's good resolutions were soon somewhat severely tasked. The first thing he

had to do was to look into his father's affairs, and they were terribly embarrassed. It was a long time before he could form an idea of what his income really was, except that it was considerably below his expectations, even after his mother's hints. But for Leonie's fortune, he must either have shut up Avonbury, or sold the house in London.

Geraldine began to think of her own plans, which were none of the brightest. She did not wish to live with her brother as soon as he should receive visitors, and she had absolutely no income to live anywhere else. Lord Lindon soon set her mind at rest on this point. He assured her that he was making arrangements to place her on exactly the same footing as Arthur, and it is needless to say that in both cases these arrangements were as liberal as his means could possibly admit.

"Of course you will continue to live with us?" he said.

"For the present, yes," said Geraldine. "But when you begin to have visitors, I must leave."

"Why so? You shall have your own rooms, and live as privately as ever you like."

"If I were a widow," said Geraldine, "I would thankfully accept your offer, but in my position I wish to avoid exciting any gossip. Besides, you know I must live in London."

"But, my dear Geraldine, all by yourself! What in the world would you find to do with yourself?"

"I confess it is not as pleasant a prospect as living with you and Leonie," said Geraldine. "You must not try to over-persuade me, Lindon,—my own inclinations urge me strongly enough in your favour, but I see my duty so clearly that I cannot hesitate."

Lord Lindon was silent—his own new feelings showed him too plainly that she was in the right for him to attempt to dissuade her; so he merely replied, "Well, you will come down to Avonbury with us. We shall go there directly."

"Yes, certainly;—I long to see the dear old place again."

We have not yet described Avonbury Castle, and will therefore say a few words about it here. It was a handsome place, rather than a fine one, situated at the extreme end of the Glastonshire Hills, where they joined the Vale

country. The house was large, but ugly, and not older than Queen Anne's reign; the park was beautiful and well wooded. The inside of Avonbury merited greater attention than the outside; the collections of pictures, books, and china being first-rate. There were one or two handsome rooms, of which the library was one, panelled with dark oak, and adorned with masterpieces of Grinling Gibbons;—relics of an older and much finer Castle, which had been burnt almost to the ground in the latter part of William the Third's reign. Such were Leonie's impressions when she first saw it. But to Lord Lindon, or Lord Bournemouth—as we must call him—and Geraldine, no place ever seemed so beautiful and charming as their own home. To her, its associations were not of unmixed brightness, for her girlhood, if tranquil, could not have been said to be actively happy, except when her brother was at home; but to him it recalled nothing but recollections of pleasure and utter freedom from restraint. Everything had been done to make it enjoyable to him up to the time when his father's failing health rendered it no longer

possible; he had here spent holidays which were one continual festivity, and vacations which were filled with every species of amusement attainable in the country; amusements shared as far as possible with his sister, whose ready wits and unfailing spirits and courage were as much a source of interest and amusement, as her remarkable beauty was of pride. And it was here he brought her back again; she a worn and wearied woman, half spent with the sore struggles of her short life; he less changed, perhaps, but still changing, and on the high road to become a sadder and a wiser man.

And the changes in their outward belongings were not less than in themselves. Their father and mother both dead, Arthur at the Cape, Gertrude—their constant visitor and playmate—a wife and mother of a family—and stranger than all besides, this beautiful West Indian at his side, the greatest and most significant change of all, and yet now so completely one of the family, that Lord Bournemouth more than once caught himself thinking in what part of the house or gardens Leonie had

been, when he and Geraldine were taking that ride, or rowing in that boat. Truly there was a great deal to occupy their thoughts when they first re-visited Avonbury!

And when they examined more closely, there was still more to occupy their heads and hands. The whole place, house, grounds, and village, had been entirely and sadly neglected. The house required thoroughly repairing, and in many parts re-furnishing; the estate had gone to rack and ruin; not a farm, cottage, hedge, or gate, but what wanted money spent on it. The gardens were a perfect wilderness; the village was a collection of tumble-down hovels, and the villagers more utterly degraded than could have been believed possible in a Christian country. A deplorable instance of the evils of non-residence. For the last ten years, ever since Geraldine's elopement, in fact, the old lord had not visited Avonbury. He lived chiefly in London, or at a small, but very beautiful place which he possessed on the sea-coast of North Wales. And now the punishment of his neglect was to fall heavily on his son. The large amount of

ready money that had to be laid out at once upon the estate was the least part of the evils to be encountered. It was easy to send for a master-builder from London, and commence a thorough investigation of every building he possessed; it was easy to examine his house, and desire the necessary repairs to be made; it was easy to hire a first-rate gardener and place him at Leonie's orders; it was easy to give her as much liberty as she liked, and as much money as she chose to spend in behalf of the villagers; but it was not easy materially to better their moral or physical condition. Thirty years of neglect, and ten of entire non-residence, had done their work, and the brutality, vice, filthiness, and improvidence contracted in nearly half a century were not to be done away in a month. Geraldine, who in the old days had known nothing of the tenantry, thought she had seen a fair specimen of what the poor could come to in the way of degradation at Abbotsbury, but she now learnt to consider Abbotsbury thriving compared to Avonbury. Her heart died within her when she went with Leonie into the cottages. Such

spectacles of misery and disease she had never dreamt could exist anywhere in England out of London, though, considering the habits of the people and the state of their dwellings, Leonie was justified in the remark that the only wonder was to see a living soul in the village. They went to call on the clergyman and his wife, who had left cards on their arrival, hoping to find willing coadjutors and advisers in them; but they proved to be an infirm old couple, who thought that they had done everything required of them when service was performed twice every Sunday, all through the year, and soup given out twice every week all through the winter, and were rather disposed to discourage all innovations, and "these new-fashioned notions."

"Certainly, we are singularly unfortunate," said Geraldine; "I had fancied the race to which these belong was almost extinct in the South. This is worse than anything that I ever saw on the Hills."

"There 's a great deal to be done here, that 's certain," said Lord Bournemouth gravely; "a nice place this for a man in search of

work! What a quantity of money it will all take!"

"Have you received the estimates yet?" inquired Leonie.

"I am to have them in a week, and a pretty sum it will be, I expect; and then we must leave a large margin. We shall have to get on bit by bit, as we can. You see that mortgage on Southdean and Cardvell must be paid off, or I have no power over the whole of that side of the estate. Groves is to come to-morrow about it. That takes a good deal of money, and though, thanks to Leonie, I am not short yet, we must manage matters prudently. The estate used to be worth thirty thousand a year, and Groves thinks it can be brought round to that, or thereabouts, again, but it will take a long time to do it."

"We have determined, Mina," said Leonie, "to let the house in London for the next three seasons, at all events. It is much too large for us, and we must keep steadily here for a time, if we mean to do any good."

"That is right," said Geraldine, "but what

will you do while the repairs are being made?"

"We shall take a small house in London, and run down now and then to see how things go on, and not set up a large establishment till next winter, when we hope to get into Avonbury."

"Well, I suppose that is the best plan; indeed, I don't see that you can do anything else," said Geraldine. "When do you think of leaving this?"

"Not till next month," said Lord Bournemouth; "there is some bothering lawyers' business I must see to first, and it will save time and money to do it here. You're not going before we do, I suppose?"

"Yes. I am afraid I must. I shall have to leave in a week; can I look out for a house for you?"

"Yes, certainly," said Lord Bournemouth, "we shall be much obliged if you will take the trouble off our hands; but we must talk it over by-and-bye; price, size, situation, and so forth. What are you going to do yourself?"

"I thought of going to stay with the Turnbulls till I can find a lodging for myself. You see," she continued, as her brother looked grave, "I have never been to see them yet, often as they have asked me, and they have been so kind to me that I would not offend them for the world."

"Why don't you go to Gertrude Kincardine's?" inquired Lord Bournemouth. "They are in Town now, and you know she has often said how much she wishes you would come and stay with her."

"She is far too gay a lady for me to visit," said Geraldine, smiling; "and it is really a case of duty with the Turnbulls."

"Geraldine is quite right," said Leonie; "they have always been true friends to her, and stood by her when no one else did. No—it is only right to visit them, if they wish it."

"There is Groves!" exclaimed Lord Bournemouth, by way of finishing the conversation, "now I must go in and plunge into law papers. Why wasn't I Arthur, with five hundred a year, and a commission in a crack regiment?"

An inquiry which very frequently proceeded from Lord Bournemouth's lips at this time.

"What shall you find to do in London all by yourself?" asked Leonie.

"I don't know; something I must, for I can't be idle. What it will be remains to be proved."

"I wish—I wish—" said Leonie, "that you were free to come and live always with us."

"Oh, hush, Leonie! hush!" cried Geraldine. "I can't bear even to think of forming any such wish!"

Leonie well knew that she meant that the wish, once indulged in, would grow upon her irresistibly, and merely said, "But can't you come and stay with us in this little house we are to have? you will be much happier, and so shall we; and really we shall live very quietly. I do wish you would; Lindon would be so pleased."

"I will think about it," said Geraldine, "it really does not sound such a bad plan. At all events, I won't take a lodging, but will come

and stay with you a little, and see how it answers."

"I thank you—I am satisfied," said Leonie, "and can go to Lindon in peace. He is sure to be in difficulties, and wanting me to get him out of them, by this time."

In a week's time accordingly Geraldine took her departure from Avonbury, leaving Lord Bournemouth and Leonie overwhelmed with business, very much puzzled by all the conflicting claims on their time and money, and a little discouraged at the unsatisfactory nature of their labours among the tenantry. Leonie, who knew very little of the English poor, was much astonished at their impassiveness, exaggerated at Avonbury to dogged sullenness by misery and ignorance. She did not know what to make of it; it baffled her completely, and seemed to her an extraordinary phenomenon in human nature. Lord Bournemouth knew better what to expect, but he was disgusted, and was more than once inclined to say that it was no use trying to do anything for them, and throw up the whole thing altogether. A feeling, however,

that he was not entirely blameless about this state of things—that at all events the sins of the father were being visited on the son, and that if he found them bad, it was his business, as far as he could, to leave them better, kept him pretty steadily to his work.

Meanwhile Geraldine had arrived in London, and been very warmly received by the Turnbulls. They were delighted to see her, and seemed as if they could never make enough of her. Emily was looking well, rather stout, and exceedingly flourishing; Emily, No. 2, the eldest daughter, was growing up a fine, tall, handsome girl; and the rest of the children were all healthy, most of them handsome, and some of them clever. They were all very much spoiled, Emily the younger inclining to be positive and domineering, the rest simply noisy and unmanageable. The house was in a constant turmoil and whirlwind of children, from morning till night, and Geraldine was greatly rejoiced when her sister-in-law announced her intention of engaging a governess, and begged for her assistance in looking out for one. This

Geraldine consented to give, on condition that Mrs Turnbull should help her in her quest after a house.

"Mrs Lawrance has been making very particular inquiries about you lately, Geraldine," said Mr Turnbull, when all the children had at length gone to bed, and he and Emily were alone with their sister-in-law; "she has asked every day when we were expecting you. Poor woman! her health is failing sadly, and her mind too, I am afraid. You must see her to-morrow."

"I will," said Geraldine; "I wish she liked me better—it is a pity, as I have so much time at my own disposal, that she will not let me be of any use to her."

"It 's no use trying," replied Mr Turnbull, "she has a fixed prejudice against you, and always will have, and that 's the long and short of it. I went to see William yesterday. Mr Elliot seems to think some change is taking place in his health. He was very torpid when I was there, and had been so, I was told, for the last four days."

"Indeed!" said Geraldine, "I must go

there to-morrow. Is it a change for the better, do they think?"

"Scarcely, I am afraid. But there is no immediate danger to be apprehended. However, you will hear what Elliot says, and form your own opinion."

"I am afraid I have been too long away," said Geraldine; "but why did you not write to me about it?"

"I had meant to do so, but then we received your letter to say you were coming, and I did not think it worth while to hurry you. But don't be uneasy—you can't think I would leave you in ignorance of anything really important?"

"Oh no! no! I know how kind you always are. Only of course I am anxious."

"I do not believe there is any cause for it. However, you will judge for yourself to-morrow."

On the morrow Geraldine and Emily set out together; going first to the Asylum, where they spent some time, as Geraldine had to see Mr Elliot (the house doctor), and hear all that had happened while she was away, and his

opinion thereon, besides seeing her husband. There certainly was a change, but he could not say he thought that it was for the better, nor, on inquiry, could she. Mr Lawrance had been less violent of late, but this quietness proceeded from a sort of sleepy torpor which seemed to be stealing over him, and which indicated some new and probably unfavourable form of the disease. The doctor discouraged the idea of her leaving London again till they should see how matters turned out.

After this was over, they proceeded to Mrs Lawrance's house. She had become exceedingly infirm both in mind and body, and very exacting. Whenever Geraldine began any subject of conversation, she saw a warning look from Emily, and found that she was stumbling against prejudices or crotchets, which had indeed trebled themselves with advancing years. They were obliged to stay two or three hours, for a short visit always offended the old lady, whom, indeed, it was now almost impossible to please. Indeed, Emily averred that even her favourite minister had ceased to give her any satisfaction. And, after all, Mrs Law-

rance's verdict was that Geraldine was just as worldly and self-seeking as ever. A satisfactory termination of their labours!

"You don't look bright, Geraldine," said Robert Turnbull, as she entered the drawing-room; "I suspect my day's work has been less fagging than yours. How did you find William?"

"Just as you described," said Geraldine, taking off her bonnet, and sinking into an arm-chair. "I don't think Mr Elliot's account at all satisfactory. He has promised to let me know if any change takes place, and I shall go every other day for the present."

"And how did you find Mrs Lawrance?"

"Far more broken than I had expected. I had no idea that her mind was failing so much. I could not persuade her I had come from Glastonshire, as she remembered nothing but my having gone to Devonshire."

"Ah, poor woman," said Mr Turnbull, "it is just in that sort of thing that her weakness shows itself. But her intellect is still strong on some points. I had to transact some little matters of business with her the other day, and

was surprised to find that her mind was so clear, and her judgment so good. Talking of business, did I not hear you say something about looking out for a house for Lord Bournemouth?"

"Yes, I have rashly undertaken it; and Emily has promised to help me."

"You can't please her better than by taking her on such an errand. She is a capital hand at it too, understands the business thoroughly, and sees the capabilities of a house in a moment."

And so indeed it proved; Emily was a most valuable assistant, and saved her a world of trouble. Though it does not sound a difficult matter to take a small house for three people, yet when Geraldine came to do it, there were so many little points to be attended to, and so many things to be considered, that the business proved rather tiresome. Then when the house had been fixed upon, and Lord Bournemouth had heard the description and approved, and it was taken, there were many little articles of furniture wanting, which would make it far

prettier and pleasanter, and which Geraldine had to get. When all the arrangements were made, Lord and Lady Bournemouth came up to Town, a week sooner than they had intended, owing to some business connected with the sale of the house and furniture, which required Lord Bournemouth's presence.

Geraldine, for her part, was not sorry to find herself once more established with them. Spite of her own efforts to like being where she was of use, spite of Emily's good-nature and Robert's agreeableness, she never felt thoroughly at ease or in her element in their house, and heartily enjoyed returning to her own people again. In her early married life, she had experienced so much of the miseries of being, so to speak, an outcast from her own class, as to fill her with a sort of morbid dread of again going out of her own station, even for a short time.

"You have done your spiriting gently, Geraldine," said Lord Bournemouth, as they sat together in the drawing-room on the first evening; "this is a tidy little box

enough, and the room looks as if we had lived in it for months. But you always were a good hand at that sort of thing."

"I declare you have got my clock and Dresden china," said Leonie. "Where did you find them? I have missed them for weeks."

"You had recklessly abandoned them to be sold with the furniture in the old house, whence I rescued them. They tell wonderfully in this little room; and when your books and other things are unpacked, we shall lose the lodging-house look entirely."

"Ah—talking of books, where are those from the old house? Not here, I suppose?" said Lord Bournemouth.

"No, there is only room for a very few of them. I looked them all over, chose out what will be most useful here, and had the rest packed up and sent to the Pantechnicon with the pictures and statues, till Avonbury is ready to receive them."

"And what have you been doing with yourself?"

"Well, really," said Leonie, "I don't think

you need ask. What has she not been doing, would be more appropriate. How did you leave the Turnbull menage?"

"Rather noisy," said Geraldine. "The children are of a troublesome age, and as there is no school-room the house is overrun with them. I can assure you the quiet here seems like Paradise after it."

"We must ask them to dinner some night, I suppose," said Lord Bournemouth. "Just ourselves, and themselves, you know. Let me see, I have scarcely seen Mrs Turnbull. Handsomish, isn't she? How do you like her?"

"Very well. But I don't think you will like her as well as her husband," said Geraldine, reluctantly. "However, you will judge for yourself."

"Have you seen Gertrude yet?" enquired Leonie.

"No, I have really had no time. She seems to be going out a good deal, to judge by the Morning Post's accounts. I saw her name at a dinner party at the Palace the other day. It must have been pleasant, I

should think, for there were several foreign celebrities, and one or two English ones—the sort of people she used to be wild to know."

"She is become such a great lady now that the scale is rather turned—they are wild to know her," said Leonie. "I don't know a pleasanter house than hers; one is sure to meet every one worth knowing, and every one not worth knowing, too. It is a complete epitome of all kinds of society."

"Henry Kincardine is—what?" inquired Lord Bournemouth.

"Vice-President of the Board of ——" said Leonie.

"Oh—ah—the same thing they offered to me, thinking me a 'rising young man,' I suppose. They mistook their game, that's certain."

"I used to wish you had accepted it," observed Leonie.

"I? I know nothing at all about the business," said Lord Bournemouth.

"Just as much as Sir Henry did, and he gets on as well as other people—rather

better, on the whole. Who can that be, knocking at the door in this style? Somebody for you, Geraldine, I suppose. No one can know that we are here."

The door was opened, "Lady Kincardine" announced, and Gertrude came in, expecting to find Geraldine alone, and rather surprised to see Lord and Lady Bournemouth with her. She had grown up very lovely, tall and graceful, with a dazzling pink and white complexion, the kindest, sweetest smile in the world, and a most bright and fascinating manner. And a very great lady she looked as she stood there, in a dress like a cloud of snow, a diamond coronet on her head, diamond drops in her ears, and diamonds shining on her neck and arms, and all over her dress.

"How splendid you look!" said Geraldine. "Where are you going? To Fairyland?"

"To the Queen's ball. I am still so much of a baby that I wanted Geraldine to see my new dress, and behold! I am caught in my own trap, and find you here."

"Yes—your beauty is discovered," said

Lord Bournemouth, laughing. "Come here at once, and be examined."

She came forward in a pretty, playful way, and made a deep, rapid curtsey.

"Prince Albert will scarcely have such a one," she said, rising up. "Well, is your Lordship pleased to approve?"

"Very highly—your Ladyship has good taste. What are these flowers? Nothing English, by their look."

"They are tropical—I forget their name; but I was in despair for a new kind of lilac flower—violets, lilacs, wisteria, and so forth, are so common! when that delightful old professor, who has lived so long in the West Indies, gave me a bit of this, which he had reared from some seeds he brought home with him. It was very kind of him, for no one in England has the plant but himself, and he had only two blossoms, one of which he gave me. Imagine my joy! I took it to Madame Cecile the next morning—and has she not imitated it exactly?"

"To the very life!" said Leonie, getting up and examining the flowers closely. "Madame

is a great artiste, and worthy of having such a model to copy. I know this flower—it used to be my particular favourite, but is so rare that I could seldom get it. You must introduce me to your Professor, Gertrude;—and do you think you could get me a seed? I know you can coax anything out of anybody."

"I will try," said Gertrude. "I expect to be in high favour, for I mean to show him my dress, and the honour which has been conferred on his bit of blossom. He ought to be pleased."

"Behold the little arts by which Lady Kincardine wins popularity," said Lord Bournemouth sententiously.

"But come—we are none of us in love with you, so we are going to harden our hearts, and call you to account. Why have you never been to see Geraldine all this time?"

"Why has she never been to see me?"

"You are a good fencer; but you have a carriage, Lady Kincardine—and she has a pair of feet."

"Don't you keep a carriage?" inquired Gertrude quickly.

"Don't you evade the question; Geraldine has no carriage now."

"Well, really I didn't know where she was—and I had no time."

"How did you know she was here, and find time now?"

"I knew she was here from Donaldson, the house-agent; and I have only found two or three seconds now. I expect Henry to fetch me every minute," said Gertrude, rather angrily, and colouring excessively.

"Gertrude has so many engagements," said Geraldine gently, coming to the rescue. "I ought to have called upon her, and meant to do so every day, only somehow the time slipped away. I will come to-morrow, and see the children. Norman must be growing up a great boy."

"Oh, you must see him! He is the finest, noblest little fellow in the world! Come to-morrow, come after one, for then he has had his morning sleep and his dinner, and is quite fresh and bright. You will be charmed! And my little girls—really, without vanity, I may say that they are great beauties."

"If they are like their mother," said Geraldine fondly.

"How beautiful you look! Does she not, Leonie?"

"Leonie is thinking of the Professor," said Gertrude smiling; "and besides, she can see no beauty in such a frivolous personage as I am."

"Don't malign me. I can see beauty in anything beautiful, I hope; and you are very pretty, and your dress in very good taste," said Leonie, with a quaint soberness.

"Why are you so sober then?" cried Gertrude, in pretty pettishness; "because you can look in the glass every day and see something far more beautiful than poor I? The French Ambassador told me the other day that he had never seen anything so splendid as Lady Bournemouth's eyes; 'they are glorious,' he said, in his funny French accent."

"Not at all," said Leonie; "good looks are very good in their way—"

"Oh dear!" interrupted Gertrude, comically, "what a lecture I shall get among all you serious, quiet people! But you go out, Leonie, and dress beautifully, too?"

"I do go out, and I hope I dress well, and you will have no lecture from me. Every one must judge for themselves. And I hope you will enjoy yourself very much at the ball, be as much admired as you like, and dance with as many grandees as there are to dance with."

"Now you are good-natured again! and you will come to-morrow and see the children?"

"Yes, certainly, with great pleasure. We will come to luncheon, if you like."

"Do, pray—ah, there is a carriage stopping at the door; that is Henry. I must go directly—he can't bear to be kept waiting."

As the servant announced that Sir Henry Kincardine had called for Lady Kincardine, Gertrude hastily kissed Geraldine and Leonie, shook hands with Lord Bournemouth, and ran down-stairs.

"How lovely she is looking!" said Geraldine. "Lindon, you were too hard upon her about coming to see me. She was quite vexed."

"And a good thing too," said Lord Bournemouth. "She is growing fine, and thinks of nothing but dress and parties. I could not

believe that she is the same girl who used to run about Avonbury with us, and go birds-nesting."

"It is very excusable," said Leonie, "so beautiful, and admired as she is."

"She is spoilt," said Lord Bournemouth.

"Spoilt by prosperity perhaps," said Leonie, "and who would not be in her place? Young, rich, beautiful, fashionable, with a husband who worships her, pretty children, and everything that heart can desire. She has not a wish ungratified—and if that is not enough to spoil any one, I don't know what is. Besides, there is a great deal of good in her. See how fond she is of her husband and children, really quite devoted to them."

"Devoted—indeed!" grumbled Lord Bournemouth. "She'll ruin him with her extravagance—she wears his fortune on her dress—interest, capital, and all."

"Now I must take up the cudgels for her," said Geraldine, laughing, "for no one can dress more plainly than she does at home, and Sir Henry is particular about her being splendidly dressed on grand occasions. And her

gown was not so very expensive to-night. The diamonds were the chief part of it, and they are family jewels. Sir Henry did not buy one of them."

"Oh, well—I can't argue against two of you; only I maintain that Gertrude is growing worldly. Perhaps you don't see it—I do."

"Well, we shall bring you back a very favourable report of her to-morrow, I don't doubt," said Leonie, "so suspend your judgment till then."

CHAPTER XII.

* * * * he
To whom a thousand memories call,
Not being less, but more than all,
The gentleness he seem'd to be,

So wore his outward best, and join'd
Each office of the social hour
To noble manners, as the flower
And native growth of noble mind;

Nor ever narrowness or spite,
Or villain fancy fleeting by,
Drew in the expression of an eye,
Where God and Nature met in light,—

And thus he bore without abuse
The grand old name of Gentleman,
Defamed by every charlatan,
And soil'd by all ignoble use.—*In Memoriam.*

SIR HENRY KINCARDINE was quite as great a gentleman in his way as Gertrude was a

great lady in hers. He was twelve years older than his wife; a whig by inheritance, and a politician and sportsman by the same. For many generations the Kincardines had represented the county on sound liberal principles, been the heads and patrons of all the amusements of their district, and filled various public offices with credit and consideration. The last representative did all these things, and did them well. In person he was strikingly handsome, with a high-bred face, and a high-bred manner, as grandly courteous as the bluest-blooded Spaniard. His talents were fair, certainly above the average, and well cultivated. On the whole, the old family of Kincardine had not for many generations produced so worthy a representative as Sir Henry. He knew it, and was proud of it, for he was essentially a proud man; proud of himself, his family, his position, his wife, his children, and all his belongings. He had married Gertrude when she was a young unformed girl, and had educated her into the woman we have found her, or rather the woman she appeared in the world; bland, gracious, somewhat proud, somewhat

unapproachable, and taking up a very high position in society with an air which seemed to say that it was her right, and only due to her merits.

Sir Henry was not at home when Leonie and Geraldine called; Gertrude was in the drawing-room, looking rather pale and languid. She was, as Geraldine had said, very plainly dressed, fashionably, and yet it was evident that she consulted her own taste and fancy more than her milliner's. She wore no cap, or ornament of any kind, except her own abundant hair, which was fastened up in thick plaits at the back of her head, and drawn very much off her pretty little ears.

"Good morning!" she said, springing up gaily. "It is quite a treat to see you after the fagging morning I have had! Am I not good? I was up at seven this morning, to be ready for Harry's breakfast at half-past eight, and have been working steadily at the children's lessons, and writing letters, ever since."

"Burning the candle at both ends," said Geraldine. "When were you in bed last night?"

"I was in bed by four—don't scold, Cherry, but listen to my account of the ball. It was delightful! Every one I cared to meet was there, and my dress was immensely admired, and there was not another in the room to compare with it."

"Did you dance much?" said Geraldine.

"I never dance much," returned Lady Kincardine, putting on a very pretty air of *grande dame;* "I don't think it the thing for a married woman of my age; besides, there are not many people worth dancing with. But there were a great many worth talking to, and altogether I enjoyed it immensely. The Queen is going to give a fancy ball next week; dresses to be of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."

"What is the object of that? Spitalfields?" said Leonie.

"I believe so—they say there is terrible distress among the weavers!" said Gertrude, her bright face clouding over for a minute. "But," she continued more gaily, "I mean to help them to the best of my power. Such a dress as I shall have! I shall go down to Hampton

Court, and see if I can't get some ideas from the pictures there."

"What does Sir Henry say to all this?" inquired Geraldine.

"He has heard nothing about it yet, but he never objects to anything that I do—unless I am not dressed well enough; and that is a mistake I shall take good care to avoid."

"I dare say!" said Leonie. "What do you expect your costume to cost?"

"Oh, I don't know precisely—but there are some of my diamonds to be reset, so I don't suppose I shall do it under £150 or £200.

"As I happen to know that your pin-money is £400 a year, I don't exactly see how you mean to manage," said Geraldine, smiling.

"Don't pry into my secrets, madam!" said Gertrude with a laugh; "I pay as far as I can —and Henry is good-natured, and pays the rest."

"A remarkably convenient arrangement!" said Geraldine. "But you promised to let us see the children; are they up yet?"

"I told Simcox to bring them down at half-past one. Come and have some luncheon, and

by the time you have finished, they will be ready. They are to be all dressed in their best for you, and then afterwards I shall take them for a drive in the park, like a pattern mother."

"And let them hear all the nonsense the young men talk to you!" thought Leonie.

They went down to luncheon, and had scarcely begun it when a rap was heard at the door, and in a few minutes "Lord Ernest Fitzgermaine and Mr Mowbray" were announced.

"Lord Ernest!" exclaimed Gertrude. "I am delighted to see you! I thought you were at the Cape?"

"So I was, but I was wounded, and have come home on sick-leave," said Lord Ernest, shaking hands with her, and colouring slightly as he bowed to Geraldine and Leonie.

Indeed he looked very ill, very pale, very thin, with that sort of depression about the mouth, and worn look round the eyes, that continued ill-health gives.

"You look wretched!" said the sympathizing Gertrude; "do sit down, and have some

luncheon—we have only just begun. I am so sorry Sir Henry is out—he would have been delighted to see you. The duke and duchess are at Dorchester, I believe?"

"Yes, and I join them there to-morrow. I mean to patch up in the country, and return to the Cape as soon as I can; it is too bad to be laid up while all the work is going on."

"Very charming ball last night, Lady Kincardine," said Mr Mowbray, who seemed to think his friend was taking up too much of the hostess' attention. "Great many pretty girls, I thought."

"A great many, there are quantities of beauties this year!" said Gertrude.

"What a pretty dress you wore! Didn't see any other I liked half as well. Are you going to the fancy ball next week? You and Lady Bournemouth should go as Night and Morning; and then the room would be positively lit up by you both."

To this peculiarly brilliant and appropriate remark, Leonie did not feel herself called upon to answer, but turned to Lord Ernest.

Gertrude drew down the corners of her

mouth, and asked demurely, "Can you tell me what costumes Night and Morning wore in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mr Mowbray?"

"I am sorry to hear that you were wounded," said Leonie to Lord Ernest.

"It's all in the day's work, I suppose," he replied, "and on the whole, I wasn't sorry to know what it felt like. Still it is a bore, for I would rather have stayed out, especially as I have just got my 'Colonelcy.'"

"Indeed! you are very young for that, are you not?"

"Yes, but our regiment was a good deal cut up in this last affair. Men run up very quickly now. There is your brother-in-law, Arthur Vivian; poor Reed's death has made him a Captain. You don't remember Reed, but he was a great friend of Lindon's."

"Tell me something about him, for Lindon will be glad to hear all particulars."

Lord Ernest complied; but what he said, however interesting to Leonie, would scarcely be so to our readers. Meanwhile Gertrude

and Mr Mowbray continued discussing the coming ball, and as Lord Ernest finished, Leonie heard Gertrude say :

"I was thinking of going down to Hampton Court to see the pictures, and pick up hints. Suppose we make a party, and dine there? Will you come for one?"

"A capital idea! I shall be delighted. We must have some nice girls. You will be *chaperon*. We won't have any stupid old women."

"Oh no! it shall be quite a young party. Let me see, there are the St Aubyns. Lady St Aubyn can't bear these things herself, and will gladly trust them to me. And Miss O'Meara. She is rather wild, a little noisy perhaps, but so pretty and so good-natured! We must have her, and her little cousin, Ellen Mitford. She is so funny and lively, and they will be only too delighted to come with me. That will be enough girls, and then we must have some young men. I will ask Lord William Beauvoir, and Lord Clarençaux, and Sir Charles Trevelyan, and Mr Hughes, and sup-

pose you undertake to ask four more. Only you must be particular, we can have only the very best set."

"Oh, of course. Will Sir Henry come?"

"Oh no! he would be bored to death. Lord Ernest, if it will not be too much for you, may we count on you?"

Lord Ernest, who looked as if he thought the party anything but inviting, said he was going down to the country.

"Oh, but you can put that off for a day or two; we will have it the day after to-morrow, or to-morrow, if you like. These things are all the better for being got up quickly."

Lord Ernest looked rather uncomfortable, and evidently wished to excuse himself.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but I have been obliged to disappoint my father once already, and I really should not like to do it again."

"If that is the case," said Gertrude, pouting, "I suppose we must make up our minds to do without you."

"Never mind the Duke," said Mr Mowbray, "he won't miss you."

"I flatter myself he will," said Lord Ernest good-humouredly, "more than your party will, I dare say."

"It is no use," said Gertrude, laughing rather angrily, "he has made up his mind. Well, shall it be the day after to-morrow? You will let me know who you have asked. I shall probably meet all my people at Lady St Aubyn's to-night, and if you are there too, we can settle everything then."

"Yes, I shall be there without fail. Well, Fitzgermaine, shall we be off?"

"If you are ready. I have one or two things to do, if you don't mind taking me. Or you can drop me at the corner if you like."

They left, and the three cousins sat in an awkward silence, Geraldine longing to remonstrate, yet not sure that it was her place to do so, Gertrude expecting a lecture, and Leonie waiting to see what happened.

At last Gertrude said, "How very much Ernest Fitzgermaine is improved! Sir George Wharton says he is considered a very rising officer; and predicts that he will astonish us all some day. It is too tiresome of him not

to join our party; I am sure the Duke could have spared him quite well. However, Mr Mowbray will find plenty of others, without giving me the trouble of asking them myself."

"Are you not afraid to trust the selection to him?" said Geraldine. "When once they are asked you must have them, whoever they are."

"Of course—why should I be afraid? He will only ask people of our own set."

"Well, I should think the care of so many wild young girls rather a responsibility, especially as you are not quite sure of your party."

"Well? Why should they be wild? What makes you say so?"

"I thought you said yourself that Miss O'Meara was rather wild, and I know the St Aubyns are very much so."

"Oh," said Gertrude, rather confused, "of course they will be careful how they behave on this occasion."

"You can't tell that," said Leonie, quickly; "a party of girls and young men are apt to be very much the contrary."

"What, do you too object?" said Gertrude, turning round abruptly.

"I have nothing to do with it, nor has any one else, provided Sir Henry approves; but I think it the wildest plan I ever heard."

Gertrude was going to make some sharp retort, when fortunately the entrance of the nurse and three children stopped her. She ran up to them, quite forgetting her temporary vexation, and taking the little boy in her arms, brought him to Geraldine, a little girl holding tightly on to each side of her dress. She had some reason to be proud of them, for they were all lovely little things, with golden curls, blue eyes, and that delicate waxen complexion which is sometimes to be seen in young children. They were well-mannered too, a little shy, but not disagreeably so, and very nicely dressed. Leonie, who liked pretty children, was delighted; and Geraldine, who liked all children, not less so, especially as the eldest little girl very strikingly resembled her own lost Freddie. She took the child on her lap, and admired and caressed it, till Gertrude began to be rather

jealous for her boy, and to think that he was overlooked. Leonie, however, made much of him and of the youngest girl, and drew them out wonderfully, till mother and nurse were charmed at the good behaviour of their pets, and the admiration they excited.

"But we are keeping you in," said Geraldine, at length, "you talked of taking them for a drive. And we have business of our own to do. So we will say good-bye now, and you must come to us as soon as you can."

They parted. Leonie and Geraldine went to one of Geraldine's schools, and Gertrude and her children for their drive. On her return she found Sir Henry in the drawing-room.

"So there is to be a Fancy Ball at the Palace, I'm told. Have we received a card?"

"It came this morning."

"And so did your dress-maker's bill. Really, Gertrude, you must be more careful. The amount is ruinous. Five hundred pounds, and this is not the first I have paid this year!"

"Five hundred pounds!" said Gertrude, in astonishment; "that woman is really unconscionable! Let me look at it. Oh, I see,

my Court dress is in it—that comes to £50. And actually she has charged £200 for my point lace skirt ! It is exorbitant ! I could have got it myself for half the money."

"Well, however that may be, the amount is far larger than I can afford. You must retrench. I give you £300 a year for your dress, and very few husbands would pay your extra bills as well. Then there is this ball coming. I suppose that will require another new dress. How much will that be ?"

"How can I tell ? A hundred, perhaps," said Gertrude, frightened into naming a far lower sum than she originally intended.

"A hundred ! A hundred for a single dress, after all the new ones you have had this season ? Gertrude, this extravagance must be ended. I am happy to give you a fair sum, but you go out of all bounds."

"Indeed, Henry, I don't think I can make it less expensive. All my friends mean to spend a great deal more on theirs."

"Their husbands are probably richer than I am. Come, Gertrude, it is not fair to argue with me in this manner. I have never grudg-

ed you anything you wished, and spent as much money on you as I could possibly afford."

"Indeed you have, Henry," said Gertrude immediately, "and I am very sorry that my bills are so high. Indeed I will retrench."

"Very well," said Sir Henry, "do so really, and I shall be satisfied. What is this plan I hear of your going to Hampton Court with a party?"

Gertrude had her misgivings as to his approval, and answered shortly, "I am going the day after to-morrow."

"And who are to make the party?"

"I don't know."

"But who do you mean to ask?"

Gertrude tossed up her head, and replied, "The St Aubyns, Miss O'Meara, and Miss Mitford, Lord Clarençaux, Lord William Beauvoir, Sir Charles Trevelyan, Mr Hughes, Mr Mowbray, and a few gentlemen he is to ask."

"I always thought Lady St Aubyn disliked this sort of party?"

Gertrude could, without telling a positive

falsehood, have easily made some answer which would have evaded the fact that Lady St Aubyn was not to be asked; but she was far too truthful and honourable to do so, and replied, "So she does, and therefore I shall ask the girls to go with me."

"Then who goes with you by way of *chaperon?* I am sure you will never persuade Mrs Mitford to do so, and that noisy Irishwoman, Lady O'Meara, would be worse than none."

"I am *chaperon* — it is quite enough to have one married woman."

"I think so!" said Sir Henry, "a married woman who is prettier than all the girls put together, and looks as young as the youngest of them! Do the St Aubyns bring either of their married sisters, Lady Silverton, or Lady Arabella Burleigh?"

"No, Lady Arabella goes down to the country to-morrow, to stay with Lady Silverton, who is already there."

"This will never do, Gertrude!" said Sir Henry. "What are you thinking of, to go

with all the fastest girls and men in London? You must get a *chaperon*."

"*Chaperons* are so stupid! They spoil a party entirely! I may as well give it up at once, if there is to be a fuss about it."

"Don't do that," said Sir Henry; "if you want to go and see the pictures, as I was told, go; but don't take such a harum-scarum party with you, without any person older than yourself to help you. My dear Gertrude, think of the responsibility. Something is sure to go wrong with such a set, and then you will be blamed, and I for allowing it. Ask Lady Grenville—she will go, I am sure, and every one would be satisfied if she were there."

"Lady Grenville! She is so stiff and cold! She would be the ruin of a party like this."

"Just think how you lower yourself by going on such an expedition. Such a set of men as you have got together too! It is not the thing for you to racket about in this way, and I wonder you don't see it your-

self. You never used to do these wild things."

"Wild! what nonsense you talk!" said Gertrude angrily, "I have set my heart on this party."

"It won't spoil it to add one more person to it," said Sir Henry drily.

"I shall give it up."

"You must either give it up, or have a proper *chaperon;* whichever you please."

Gertrude made no answer. She did not, at heart, wish to give up her party; neither did she wish to yield; and sat turning over in her mind whether she could venture to disobey her husband's express commands. She left the room, and went to dress for Lady St Aubyn's party, determined to ask all the people she had fixed upon, and add some one else as *chaperon,* if she found it inevitable. Her state of mind was very unenviable. This was the first difference she had ever had with Sir Henry, who was only too willing to gratify all her wishes, and she felt herself exacting and encroaching for

going beyond what he could reasonably be expected to allow. She wished she had never raised the question, but taken Geraldine's judgment, and remodelled her plan. After all, it would be far pleasanter to go down with Sir Henry and one or two of her friends, than with this wild set, which, at heart, she disliked and despised. Should she tell Sir Henry this evening that she would do as he wished, and invite Lady Grenville to join her? Unfortunately, she had a determined fit of self-will and obstinacy, and was resolved to have her own way if possible, cost what it might. She went down silent and sulky; Sir Henry, feeling himself entirely in the right, was very much and very justly annoyed. He tried to begin a conversation once or twice, but finding that she was resolved to answer in nothing but monosyllables, betook himself to a displeased silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

Struggling conscience,
The colour of the King doth come and go
Between his purpose and his conscience,
Like heralds 'twixt two dreadful battles sent.

SHAKSPEARE.

"WELL, Cherry," said Lord Bournemouth, when they were at breakfast the next morning, "I forgot to ask you how you found Gertrude yesterday. Was she doing the prudent matron, spinning in the midst of her maidens, and dressed in humble attire?"

"As far as dress went, it was all very right

—at least for the moment," said Geraldine, laughing, and stopping short.

"Well," said Lord Bournemouth, "what is it? What wasn't right?"

Geraldine looked at Leonie, and replied, "Why, the fact is, I think you are partly right, and she is rather more extravagant and giddy than is quite justifiable."

"I told you so!" said Lord Bournemouth. "Well, what follies and expenses is she going to launch out into?"

"I don't know that she will launch out into any; that remains to be proved; but, from her way of talking, she gave me the impression of thinking rather more of these things than I should consider quite right."

"I suspect that's a very mild version of the story, and we shall presently hear of a row between the prudent Gertrude and her husband. Henry Kincardine is a fine fellow; I'm sorry for him, with such a silly wife."

"Keep your pity till it's wanted," retorted Leonie. "Sir Henry is very well satisfied with his wife, and, as far as I can see, quite competent to manage his own affairs. If Ger-

trude is a little reckless, it is only a fault of youth, and will right itself by-and-bye."

"I've done then!" said Lord Bournemouth, "we shall see. Here is a cab stopping at the door, with a footman outside. And, wonder of wonders! there is the prudent Gertrude inside! Depend upon it, she has got into a scrape, and wants you to get her out of it. 'Well, Lady Kincardine,'" he continued as she entered, "'what's the row?' is an appropriate question, I suspect."

"You become more slang every day!" said Gertrude, with a forced laugh. "I have come to see Leonie and Geraldine; there is nothing extraordinary in that?"

"Gertrude is much earlier than we are," said Leonie. "I am ashamed that you should find us still at breakfast at half-past eleven, but it's all Lindon's idleness! It throws us out sadly—ask Geraldine if it doesn't."

"Geraldine has generally run over the whole of London before breakfast is ready," said Lord Bournemouth; "I shall have to be earlier, if only to keep an eye on her. Perhaps that is your case?"

"Not at all! I and Henry breakfasted three hours ago. And now you may go out as soon as you like, for I have business with Geraldine and Leonie."

"Begging your pardon, I have only just finished my first egg, and there is another to come after it, not to speak of other things. Pretty manners, indeed, for you to come at cock-crow, turning my house upside down, and me out of it! Just sit down, and have five minutes quiet and rational conversation. So I hear you are going to the Queen's ball? In what character does Henry go? Nothing under a hero, or Louis Quatorze, I suppose? But he is such a great big fellow, and Le Grand Monarque was small."

"They only found that out after his death," said Leonie. "Perhaps the same discovery may be made at Sir Henry's."

"Ah—I dare say—I've always suspected he is a bit of a humbug," said Lord Bournemouth. "But setting aside Louis le Grand—and now I recollect that Henry once told me he considered Louis' political economy deplorably

mistaken, and I take it he is the last man to assume the character of a mistaken political economist—let us consider what characters there are open to him. Condé—but Condé was a little man, I believe."

"I wish you would find something," said Gertrude. "Henry will go—indeed he thinks he shall rather like the sight; but he can't bear the trouble of settling his dress. I know I shall have to do it."

"What do you think of Charles I.?"

"Charles I.! I think so! I should like to see Harry dressed as Charles I.!"

"Ah!" said Lord Bournemouth, "I forgot — another mistaken political economist — clearly won't do.—I have it! Really this idea is so good that I must sell it—to give it gratis would be Quixotic extravagance. What will you bid?"

"You must let me have it cheap; on account of our cousinship—and really I must retrench. I had three lectures on extravagance yesterday —one from Leonie, one from Geraldine, and one from Henry. Harry's was the most

serious;—but your party acquitted themselves extremely well, and I should not wonder if they made an impression."

"Well done, our side!" said Lord Bournemouth. "After that, I can't lead you into fresh expenses, and must make you a present of my suggestion. Now listen—DORSET!"

"Dorset!" said Gertrude. "Who was he? Oh, I remember! Yes, to be sure—in the reign of James II. I used to think I should like to have married him—Dorset, I mean. Thank you, Lindon—and now the sooner you go the better. I have no time to spare."

"Here's gratitude!" said Lord Bournemouth, "to pick my brains, and then tell me to be off. Well—what must be, must be. *Au plaisir.*"

"And now, Gertrude, what is the matter?" said Leonie. "Something has gone wrong, I see by your face."

"Indeed it has," said Gertrude. "Henry is so cross about this party to Hampton Court;—he says I must give it up, or ask Lady

Grenville, or some other stupid person, to go with me as *chaperon*."

"And quite right too," said Leonie.

"Indeed I don't think so at all. It's very unkind of him to spoil my party."

"I can't think how you can wish to do such a thing," said Leonie. "You would lose yourself terribly—in your position every one would notice it; and if anything went wrong, you would be compromised."

"My dear Gertrude," said Geraldine gently, "do be reasonable. Sir Henry's disapproval ought to be enough to make you give up the party, even if it were unobjectionable in itself. Is it worth while to displease your husband—to be ungrateful for all his kindness for the sake of a party you don't care about, and probably won't enjoy?"

"I do care about it! I shall enjoy it! I don't see that Henry is so particularly kind!" cried Gertrude, like a naughty child.

"Now you are put out, and won't consider what you are saying," said Geraldine quietly. "Come, Gertrude, be a sensible woman, and

give it up. You must do so at last, and may as well do it with a good grace."

Gertrude sat twisting her rings, tearing her gloves, and putting out her under-lip, looking so like a child in a pet, that Leonie could not forbear smiling.

"A pretty example you would set your daughters, if they were here," she said; "I don't suppose little Edith could be a greater baby. I am older than you, and, I hope, steadier; but Lindon would no more think of letting me go on such an expedition, in such company, than he would think of flying."

"I dare say!" pouted Gertrude. "Lindon shuts you up like—like—a Turkish woman!" the simile coming in very fortunately, just as she was at a loss to finish her sentence.

"*Enfant gâté!*" laughed Leonie.

"Dear Gertrude," pleaded Geraldine, "do give it up. I would not go myself with such a party, without any of my belongings—old and ugly as I am."

"I can take care of myself!" cried out Gertrude. "Nothing has ever been said about me!"

The moment the words were out of her mouth, she heartily wished them unsaid; indeed, they slipped out in her ill-temper before she was well aware of what she was saying. Geraldine flushed, and the tears sprang to her eyes, as she turned away her head; Leonie's face turned white; her great black eyes glowed like two coals of fire; she rose, walked up to Gertrude, stood straight before her, and said, "Unsay that! Beg her pardon directly!"

Gertrude had never felt so frightened in her life; Lady Bournemouth angry was at no time a pleasant spectacle, and there was about her on the present occasion that sort of suppressed wrath that is so far more terrible than the fiercest outbreak. Gertrude lost her presence of mind, trembled, shrunk back, and hid her face in her hands.

"Unsay your wicked words directly!" said Leonie, dragging her hands from her face, and compelling her to look up.

"Geraldine! dear Geraldine!" cried Gertrude, half out of her senses with fear and remorse, "I am so sorry—I did not mean it—

I know it was not your fault!" and she burst into a torrent of hysterical tears.

"There—be quiet, and don't let us have a scene," said Leonie coldly. "If Lindon knew what you have said, you would never enter his house again. So you had better not let him come back and find you crying."

This was a *ruse* to stop the fit of hysterics which seemed imminent, for Leonie very well knew that Lord Bournemouth would not be at home for hours. It answered, for Gertrude presently took out her pocket-handkerchief, applied it to her eyes, and sobbed out, "You won't tell him! I did not mean it! I can't think why I said it!"

"Nor I either," said Leonie, now seized with a strong inclination to laugh, the whole thing having assumed such an irresistibly comic appearance.

"Dear Gertrude," said Geraldine, "I know you did not mean it, so let us hear no more about it. But you will give up this party?"

"Oh yes—anything you like; but what shall I say to the people? They are all asked,

and it is settled for to-morrow. I have no time for anything."

"Then it can't be helped—you must get a *chaperon* and go," said Leonie; "only do be steady; take care how you behave, and don't stay too late."

"I wish I had never planned it! I can't think what I was thinking of!" sighed Gertrude.

"Can't you get Sir Henry to go with you?" said Geraldine.

"He is busy all day at his office; besides, he can't bear the people I've asked. He says the girls are rackets, and the men puppies."

"*Drôle que tu es!*" ejaculated Leonie, as she and Geraldine burst out laughing. "It will do you no good to fret; you are fairly entangled, and must make the best of it," was her next characteristic observation. "Now don't cry—there is no such great harm done. Stay with us for luncheon. Send your footman home for the carriage, and then go in the afternoon *chaperon*-hunting."

To this Gertrude agreed, and presently re-

covering her spirits, laughed and talked as if nothing had gone amiss in the morning, and there were no party impending.

The search for *chaperons* was successful; Lady Grenville agreed to go, and take an exceedingly plain daughter; quiet little Mrs Mitford—Ellen's mother—discovered that her dear child was apt to catch cold, and reckless about sitting in draughts, and was glad of an invitation to accompany her; and finally, Lord Ernest Fitzgermaine found that he was obliged to wait in Town another day on business, supposed to be at the tailor's—and signifying the same to Gertrude, joined the party. Sir Henry was amply satisfied, and considered that she had made handsome amends, as she had obtained two *chaperons*, and at all events one man of a better stamp than the others. And to smoothe all difficulties, Lord Clarençaux, the worst of the set, knocked down a policeman, and found himself unexpectedly lodged in the House of Correction on the very morning of the party, whereat Sir Henry was hugely delighted. On the whole it went off well; they did not stay long enough to be

dull, and the ladies, young and old, declared that they had stored their minds with invaluable hints from the pictures. Gertrude herself, on examining them, suddenly gave up the 17th for the 18th century, declaring that patches, powder, hoops, and red heels were what would suit her best.

When Leonie and Geraldine heard these details, they fondly hoped that all disputes were over; and that Gertrude would go to the fancy-ball in a reasonably expensive dress,—which, considering all they had witnessed, proved them to be a pair of remarkably sanguine women.

Gertrude, being utterly dissatisfied with all she had seen at Hampton Court, went picture-seeking with extraordinary assiduity, visited all the private and public exhibitions in and near London, looked over books and prints, and held daily consultations with her dressmaker, till even that unwearied female, having eighty or more dresses to arrange and execute before the end of the week, became utterly distracted, and declared in the midst of her circle of satellites that "of all di ladies who

did 'ave dere toilettes from her establishment, dere vas not von so exigeante, so vat you call fussy, as mi ladi Keencardeen." At last her fertile brain invented a dress, designed from an old French print of great beauty and rarity. Needless to say, it was expensive in all its details. Gertrude economised in a few unimportant particulars, and said triumphantly to herself, "I am sure I have been as careful as any one could wish—and now I will have my new fan."

This was a superb jewelled fan, which she had discovered in a corner of the picture, and of course she was wild to complete her costume by procuring one like it. Modern fans would never do—they were too trumpery for the rest of the dress;—she had a vary valuable old Spanish one, but that was not "in keeping." There was an old curiosity shop, where she was in the habit of sometimes dawdling away a few hours, turning over and envying all she saw, and not unfrequently buying more than Sir Henry could well afford to pay for. To this place she went; and by the greatest good-luck, as she considered it—Sir Henry would

probably have thought otherwise if he had been present—the proprietor had just received a fan, much in the same style as that of the picture. Of course Gertrude took possession of it with delight. True, the price was fifty pounds—"but then I have been so economical about the dress!" she thought.

This was her usual way of retrenching; she would save five shillings, and, on the strength of that, spend five pounds; carried out on a larger scale, Gertrude's fits of economy were ruinous, and made her husband tremble.

When the dress was completed and put on, it as far exceeded every other costume at the ball in beauty as Gertrude did every other woman. She had managed to combine great richness of material and colouring, with great lightness and unity of effect; a desirable result, not too often attained in the toilettes of our countrywomen.

Geraldine and Leonie, who came to see her before she started, were confounded at the magnificence of her appearance, and even Sir Henry, little as he knew of such matters, asked whether it was not rather an expensive

get up? He himself looked exceedingly well, in a costume copied from a portrait of Lord Dorset. The colouring was dark and very plain, and its sober richness set off the stately and somewhat sombre style of his beauty. They were by far the handsomest couple in the room, as Leonie heard from all her friends the next day, generally accompanied by remarks upon the extravagance of Gertrude's dress.

"I suppose she can afford it," was her usual indifferent answer; "besides, lace and jewels can be hired."

But in her own mind she was far from satisfied, and told Geraldine that they should hear something about it before the bills were paid. Geraldine agreed with her, but, to their great astonishment, the London season ended, Parliament was prorogued, Sir Henry and Gertrude went to Scotland, and not a word was heard about the dress.

"She can't have paid for it," said Geraldine, as they were talking it over. "She means to economise in the country, and pay at Christmas, or next season. And yet it can't be that either, for I know Sir Henry has a horror of

leaving bills unpaid, and has strictly forbidden her to leave any in London at the end of the season. I remember her saying so the other day, for I thought at the time that he would have been ruined by now, but for that check upon her."

"She must have pawned her diamonds," said Leonie, laughing. "But there is no use in discussing the question, especially as I want you to come out with me, and choose a hat. I can't go down to the country without one."

"Go down to the country! Have you settled to go?"

"Yes—did I not tell you? How stupid I am! We mean to stay a fortnight, and we go next Tuesday. Dear me! how could I have forgotten!"

"Now I think of it, you did say something about it, but remembering that Avonbury is in confusion, I thought you were laughing or dreaming. And where do you expect to find a sound piece of roof to shelter you?"

"In—don't laugh—the keeper's cottage. It will be such fun! The keeper is to go into a cottage in the village, and we into his. There

is a room for you. Don't be scornful; it is a tidy place; tidier, Lindon says, than it used to be in your time, for it was lately repaired, the only place that was. We shall be splendidly lodged—far better than a great many people who are going to the moors. We shall have a cook and housemaid, and Baxter will come with us, and my maid will go to see her friends, for there is no room for her. Shall you be ready by Tuesday?"

"I? don't flatter yourself that I am coming. My tastes are not so rural. I shall stay with the Turnbulls."

"And be distracted by the children. That will never do. You must stay here, if you won't come with us, and don't mind being alone. After all, it will only be for a fortnight."

"I shall make myself quite happy here for a fortnight, and find plenty to do; more, perhaps, than you will in the country. Mind you write long letters to say what you are about. You will have plenty of time, with Lindon out fishing all day."

They went, and Leonie certainly found

plenty of time for letter-writing, though it appeared that her days were otherwise pretty well occupied. From her accounts everything was progressing satisfactorily, and the house would certainly be ready for them by the spring. Some of the worst cottages had been pulled down, and one or two new ones were building. The new school-house, too, was begun. This was all that was to be attempted for the first year; but this was much, and more was to follow by degrees. Leonie had been two or three times to see the buildings, and rectified two or three mistakes that were in process of being perpetrated in stone and mortar. She had been much among the poor, and several times to the little dame school, and had come to the conclusion that, on the whole, the people were not as stupid as they looked. Indeed, in one particular, she soon found that they were more knaves than fools, for as soon as they discovered that they could obtain relief by applying to her, they did so, and imposed upon her not a little. But she found out one or two mistakes, and that put her on her guard against others, and, on the whole,

she managed tolerably well. Lord Bournemouth helped her as much as he could, and went with her to the cottages, greatly to the astonishment of their owners, who had been accustomed to think that it was "only parsons and ladies as ever troubled their heads about poor bodies." They liked him better, on the whole, than Leonie; "he was sich a pleasant gentleman, and always spoke to them as if they was as good as he;" and never, it must be confessed, detected their impostures as she did. Altogether the fortnight slipped rapidly away, and their departure for London was put off so often, that a month elapsed before Geraldine saw them again. They stayed in Town all the autumn, at least Leonie and Geraldine did; Lord Bournemouth went several times down to Avonbury, and paid several visits in the country for shooting and hunting, all of which Leonie encouraged, as London never suited her husband for long together. Indeed it was no small trial for an eager sportsman to have to stay there all the season, and though Lord Bournemouth bore it far more patiently than most men would have done, his

pleasure on setting off for a few days' visit into the country was ludicrous to see. In November came an invitation for the Bournemouths and Geraldine to spend Christmas with the Kincardines. Geraldine declined, but her brother and sister accepted, not for Christmas, but for the first fortnight in December, as Lord Bournemouth was evidently anxious to be on the move again, and positively refused to go without his wife. And Leonie, for her part, began to think that she had been stationary long enough, and would like to see Kincardine Castle, where she had never yet been.

CHAPTER XIV.

Caledonia! thou land of the mountain and rock,
Of the Ocean, the mist, and the wind!
Thou land of the torrent, the pine, and the oak,
Of the roebuck, the hart, and the hind!
Though bare are thy cliffs and though barren thy glens,
Though bleak thy dim islands appear,
Yet kind are the hearts and undaunted the clans
That roam on these mountains so drear.—HOGG.

IT was evening when Lord Bournemouth and his wife reached Kincardine Castle, — a raw, misty evening. Leonie's teeth chattered

in her head, though she was buried in furs, and all the windows of the carriage were shut. She began to wonder how she was to exist for ten days in this region of frost and ice. Very desolate looked the park, with its gaunt leafless trees standing up black, sulky, and motionless, in the dead stillness of the frosty night. Very cold and frowning looked the house, and scarcely distinguishable from the crags that backed it; a great iron-grey mass, with here and there a bright eye of fire shining out from some window. A broad stream of light issued from the hall doors, across the dark gravel, when they were thrown open; and as they entered the hall, down the dark oak stairs at the end ran Gertrude, bright and beautiful, and very gaily dressed.

"I knew it was the carriage! I heard it coming!" she cried, "and Henry said it was all a mistake. Ah! but here he is though," she continued, turning round, and seeing her husband following more slowly. "Come in; you must be perished with cold, Leonie; I know you are chilly. Will you come up to your room? We have a few

friends staying with us, and dinner is just ready; will you come down to dinner, or shall some be sent up? Perhaps you would prefer it sent up?"

"Now, Gertrude, if you will let me get in a word," said Sir Henry, advancing. "What has kept you so late, Lindon? We had almost given you up. But never mind—better late than never. There are some of your friends here, Ernest Fitzgermaine among them; and we expect to give you a curling match to-morrow, if the frost holds; quite a small affair, but Invercarron will come down with his curlers; and we flatter ourselves that it will be a novelty to Lady Bournemouth, at all events."

"That's capital," said Lord Bournemouth, rubbing his hands; "it's ten years since I've seen a curling match, or Invercarron either; and as to Leonie, her only idea of Highlanders is taken from tobacco shops, and curling is connected in her mind with nothing but her hair."

Meanwhile Gertrude was pulling off a few

of Leonie's outer wraps by the great roaring hall fire.

"What a quantity of things you have on! how pale you look!" she said; "I am sure you are very cold, and you have a headache?"

"I have a headache, and I am very cold," said Leonie.

"Will you have some dinner sent up to my room? Lindon will dine with you, I am sure."

"Oh dear!" said Gertrude. "I wish we had not all these people here, and I would come and have a cozy little dinner with you. But I am glad we have collected a pleasant party for you. I don't think Lindon will find it dull."

"I can answer for that," said Leonie. "He will enjoy it of all things; nothing he likes better than a country-house party—and I am longing to see something of Scotland."

"You must come to us earlier another year; there is nothing like a Highland autumn;—though I scarcely consider this the Highlands myself. Now this is your room. See what a

great blazing fire I have made. That is my work;—I have been piling it up all the afternoon, for I remembered your chilly West Indian ways. Have you everything you want? There is the bell—and I must go down now, or dinner will be quite cold, and every one cross. Shall you come down to-night at all?"

"No, I think not," said Leonie, "I am lazily disposed, and my head is just bad enough to make a capital excuse."

"Well, then, I will come up and see you after dinner." And Gertrude hurried away.

Leonie untied her bonnet, and threw herself down into a vast and very comfortable arm-chair.

"How comfortable everything is!" she thought. "Life runs on particularly well-oiled wheels with some people, even if they do live up here, when they have a beautiful place, and plenty of money. This sort of country-house life is just what would lead me astray, and make me selfish and self-indulgent. Oh, I hope I may be kept from that! The life of mere intellectual and animal pleasures—the life of a reasoning

brute, in short! I sometimes think I have too few trials—there is too little of the warfare in my life; though I have had my share of troubles past and gone, too. I am glad this is only a holiday, and not my daily life. Poor Gertrude!"

And thereupon she fell to musing, or rather dreaming, more unconnectedly, till her maid came and unpacked her boxes; and then she took her Bible from among her books, and read for an hour, till a light step was heard at the door, and Gertrude came in. And then they chatted for half an hour, and Gertrude told the names of every one in the house, among which Leonie recognised those of some of her particular friends, who had been asked on purpose to meet her.

"You must drive with me to-morrow," said Gertrude. "The curling pond is three miles off, too far for me to walk, or for you either. Lady Arabella Burleigh and Mrs Dudley Tredegar will do so! but you know me of old; I never walk when I can ride or drive. And the ponies are frosted, so it will be quite safe. The other ladies can dowager about in the

barouche, and we will have a cozy little chat by ourselves."

"Do you drive yourself?" inquired Leonic, in some alarm.

"Oh no! not in this sort of weather, Henry wouldn't allow me to do it for the world; he says I should throw the ponies down, and break their knees. You need not be afraid; my little postillion Tom is very careful, and rides well. I wish you could see Lady Arabella drive! Henry says she has a better hand on a horse than any man he ever saw. Actually she drove the Duke of Stirling's drag, from Glenfindland to here. To be sure our roads are good, but there are one or two awkward precipices, and very sharp turns."

"Is Lady Amy St Aubyn here? I used to like her; she struck me as being quieter and less worldly than Lady Arabella."

"Oh, yes! dear little Amy! She is a nice little thing; not as clever and amusing as Bella, but quieter, as you say, and so unselfish and fond of her sisters. I don't know what you will think of Mrs Dudley Tredegar. Henry said I must ask them, because Mr Tredegar

did something very good-natured for him about a horse; but I don't quite make her out. However, she is very clever and obliging, and invaluable in this sort of party."

"Who is she? How did you first know her?"

"I don't know who she was; he has a good property in Wales. He was not in society, and never would have been but for his wife, who seems to me rather a pushing person. However, I don't know much about her, except that last year nobody had even heard her name, and this year one meets her everywhere. But I am keeping you up, and myself too. They will wonder why I don't come down. We breakfast at nine to-morrow, I hope it won't be too early for you; but Henry thinks the match may be finished in one day if they begin betimes. And it is more convenient for Mr McLeod to go back to Invercarron with his men to-morrow night. Good-bye."

Leonie slowly undressed and went to bed, revolving all these things, and many more, in her mind. The last words which came before

her distinctly had assuredly not been spoken by Gertrude. They were, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." And instinctively she breathed a prayer, half asleep as she was, "Good Lord, deliver me!" and then fell quite asleep, and did not wake again that night.

But the next morning, the first thing she did was to look out of window, and to stand for a quarter of an hour gazing with delight on the grand savage mountains before her; their brown iron sides covered with a thin coat of snow, except where overgrown by the dark pine woods. At the foot of the mountains ran the Carron, on its way to the sea, from the wild country of Invercarron where it had its rise. Its course was now marked by a thick line of mist, which enveloped all that part of the landscape. Leonie thought she should never be tired of looking on this scene, so new to her, and was only recalled to herself by Lord Bournemouth's voice calling out, "What are you doing there, Leonie? Catching your death of cold? Come away—

you will see plenty of mountains here, I promise you."

She turned away, and presently proceeded to dress; then went down to breakfast, prepared to enjoy her day and her company as far as she could.

Gertrude was down, and with her a lady and gentleman, whom Leonie easily guessed to be Mr and Mrs Dudley Tredegar. The gentleman was tall, light, red-faced, and rather fast in his appearance; the lady short, with a pretty, very pretty brunette face, sparkling eyes, a neat plump figure, and the tiniest of hands and feet. She was dressed extremely well, but too fashionably and too carefully to be quite good style: and her conversation, like her dress, had something of the defect of over-smartness and effectiveness. The next person who entered was a tall, dark, graceful woman, whose clan tartan gown announced her to be Mrs McLeod of Invercarron. She had been a lassie from the Western Highlands, and still retained much of the great beauty which had recommended her, a poor

orphan, to her wealthy cousin, Invercarron, though a certain melancholy in her face might seem to say that her lot was not as enviable as it appeared to all her tribe of relations, poor and rich. She had come down from Invercarron the day before, as her husband meant to walk over the hills with his men.

After her came in little Lady Amy St Aubyn, looking like a mere child, with her slight bending figure, fair innocent face, and golden hair pushed off her ears; and she was immediately followed by Lord Ernest Fitzgermaine, whom Leonie greeted with the hearty welcome she always bestowed upon him. He had recovered his strength and good looks, and was going to return to the Cape after Christmas, which fact he communicated to Leonie, next whom he sat at breakfast.

"My best wishes go with you," she said, "I shall look for your name in the despatches."

"Perhaps there may be some of my own if you care to read them. But affairs at the Cape must, I think, be very dull to any one in England; though of course to

you and Bournemouth, the fact of Arthur's being there gives them an interest. As for me, it is apparently my only chance for the present of seeing active service."

"Ah, don't I wish I were you, Ernest!" said Lord Bournemouth, from his other side. "Never you be an eldest son and landed proprietor if you can help it."

"I suppose that depends more upon Fitzgermaine than myself," was the laughing answer. "I hope with all my heart he will marry again."

"You well may," returned Lord Bournemouth gravely; "an estate 's a fine plague, I can tell you, especially if it happens to be embarrassed. No, a clear thousand a year and commission in a cavalry regiment for me, and then I wouldn't thank Lord—if he made me a Duke. How is Arthur getting on? It is so long since I have seen him, and men alter so much at his age, that I can scarcely judge of him from his letters."

"He is doing very well, and is sure to rise. Little used to think him one of the best officers in the regiment."

"He tells me that they are all delighted at your having the regiment, and so I suppose are you, though you say you liked Little better than the others. Isn't that Mowbray coming in? And Charley Barking too? I do think that boy grows a greater prig every year; what does Henry have him here for?"

"I don't know—nor does Lady Kincardine either, I suspect. However, he is not quite as insufferable as he used to be; though he still enjoys the privilege of being the only man I know who never has a good word spoken for him."

"There are still two or three places empty; who isn't down?"

"The three literary men, I think; Elston, Sir James Pennant, and Mr Kinghorn. Do you know Kinghorn? A rising poet, they say. All the women here rave about his books; I don't know much about that:—but he is not a bad fellow; made his own way, and is not ashamed of it."

"Ah, that's unusual; for the men who work their way up are apt to be snobs. There was one Leonie made a fuss about once, and

she insisted on being introduced to him. One word with him was enough—she never wanted another. And yet he was in good society, and people didn't seem to object to him. By the bye, who are these Tredegars? Where did Henry pick them up?"

"That's more than I can tell you—or any one else," said Lord Ernest, lowering his tone. "He is known in Wales, but she is nobody, and nobody knows where she came from. She is popular, but, for my part, I think Tredegar is the best of the two. He is a snob—but he knows it, and doesn't presume."

"Which is more, I take it, than can be said for her," said Lord Bournemouth, with a glance at Mrs Tredegar.

"Well—so the ladies here seem to think, by the pains they take to keep her down," said Lord Ernest, laughing. "She isn't a bad little woman though; especially in a country house. Rather like a laughing hyena, but that's a trifle. Who is coming now? oh, Burleigh and Lady Arabella."

"Do you know him? What is he like?" said Lord Bournemouth.

"Oh, don't you know him? I like him well enough, he is very good-natured, and the finest rider I know. Better than his wife, and that's not saying a little. Kincardine's brother Willie is coming here to-night—a nice young fellow he seems. But you know him, I suppose?"

"No, I don't. Let me see—that's his sister, sitting between Mowbray and Mr Tredegar? It's an odd thing that I know so little of Henry's relations, considering that his wife is a kind of second sister of mine."

"Yes—that is Miss Kincardine. I call her pretty, though it is not the fashion to admire her as much as her married sister, Mrs Chetwynd, who is on the other side of the table, not far from her husband—the man with the gold lockets hanging to his watch chain. And now I have given you the *carte du pays*, I think."

"Is not that Kinghorn coming in now?" said Lord Bournemouth.

"Yes; he is not a bad-looking fellow, is he?"

"H'm—pretty well—tolerable. There's

Elston, apparently up in the clouds. Now for a torrent of big words. How I hate a man who can't forget his books!"

"You will be spared the big words, at all events," said Lord Ernest; "he has not seemed up to the mark in the morning lately. I did hear some story about his having taken to opium eating."

"And a true one, I dare say," said Lord Bournemouth, with a keen glance at the great author; "well, it's a pity and a shame, but every one has his weakness, I suppose."

"There is Lady Kincardine getting up," said Lord Ernest. "You skate, don't you, Bournemouth? Come with me, and let us find you a pair of skates; we shall be glad enough of something to warm us before the day is over."

A little dawdling about and gossiping, a little running in and out to see if Sir Henry's party of curlers had all assembled, and then the sound of bagpipes drew every one to the windows. There were Invercarron and his men coming down the side of one of the smaller hills; a goodly number of fine-looking Highlanders,

fully armed, and carrying Lochaber axes; implements wholly unnecessary for their present peaceful occupation; but it was a fancy of Invercarron's to keep up, in every particular, the state, as well as the equipments, which had been a matter of necessity in the days of his forefathers. Twenty minutes sufficed for them to cross the ferry, and march up to the Castle—the Chief was not so rigorous an adherent to the exigences of two centuries ago, as to ford the river on a raw December morning—and Mrs McLeod, hastily leaving the drawing-room, drew a plaid over her head and shoulders, and went out to meet her husband. He was a powerful-looking, thick-set man, of middle height and age—his face, which was poor in feature and animal in expression, was half covered with reddish whiskers, beard, and moustache. His voice was shrill and harsh, but in his manner there was something of the dignity and ease of a Highland Chief; both qualities being induced by a firm persuasion that Scotland—or at least that part of Scotland—did not hold a greater man than the Laird of Invercarron. He, as well as his fol-

lowers, called his wife "Leddy Invercarron," and he greeted her graciously, as she came to meet him, with considerable timidity in her manner.

"He looks the half savage he is," was Lord Bournemouth's comment to Leonie.

"Well, Kincardine," said he, speaking in a shrill, harsh Scotch accent, "we are ready to start when you please."

"Surely you and your men will have something to eat first, after your march?" inquired Sir Henry.

"Eh? something to eat? Well—we'll have a bit—and a drop of whisky, if you please. March? only fifteen miles; we are as fresh as when we started."

This might be true of Invercarron, but was certainly not so of his men; therefore Sir Henry gave orders that refreshments should be served instantly, and he himself conducted the Chief to the dining-room. It was three quarters of an hour before the party were fairly started. Lady Arabella Burleigh and some of the gentlemen had walked on before, Mrs Tregedar declining to accompany them on

finding that the barouche party included Mr Elston, as well as Mrs Chetwynd and Miss Kincardine. Mr Kinghorn had insisted on taking a solitary ramble in an entirely opposite direction, rather to Sir Henry's disgust; and Sir James Pennant had petitioned for a small, stout, and quiet sheltie, on which—the sheltie being "frosted"—he was now ambling about much to his own satisfaction, his benevolent face beaming with enjoyment.

"I thought you told me Mrs Tredegar was going to walk," said Leonie to Gertrude, when they were seated in the pony carriage.

"So she was; but, on discovering that Mr Elston went in the barouche, changed her mind. Margaret and Georgie will find her dreadfully in their way, for they meant to have had a literary gossip with him."

"No one but you could have made those three literati amalgamate with this sporting party," said Leonie. "How came you to ask them?"

"There's a nice question, when they were invited for your especial amusement! Besides, do you know that you are grievously insulting

my husband? Harry is not accustomed to look upon himself as a mere sporting man; and as to Margaret Chetwynd, she would never forgive you for thinking that she could not 'appreciate' them, as she says, and entertain them all single handed."

"Eh, *ma foi!* is that her line?" said Leonie. "I had no idea of it. How pretty she is!"

"Beautiful eyes, and so forth, but not a good figure, and far too conscious."

"You don't like her?" said Leonie, interrogatively.

"Straightforward as ever, I see! Certainly Georgie is my favourite; Margaret is sharp and hard, and rather a *mauvaise langue.* Besides, she always seems watching me, as if she expected to find out something wrong."

"But if she can't—and I suppose she can't—what does it matter?" inquired Leonie, turning to her in some surprise.

"Oh, of course not; but still, you know, one doesn't like that sort of thing; it is not pleasant," said Gertrude quickly, and rather nervously. "But, do you see? here

we are at the curling pond. What capital order the ice is in! When they begin, we will get out, that we may see it more closely, and I will find a competent gentleman to explain it to you. Do you skate? There is a large skating pond a quarter of a mile off, and I have had plenty of skates put up in the carriage."

"Skate! you forget that I never saw ice till I came to England, and at my advanced age I am too old to learn."

"Ah well, that is a pity, but never mind. Now look, Leonie, they are taking their places. See what heavy stones they play with! Here is dear old Sir James, on that stout little pony, looking like a boy out for a holiday."

"What a pretty sight!" said Sir James, coming up at the moment; "it does one good to see so many people enjoying themselves. Even the very countrymen look as if they liked the fun as well as their betters."

"I was just saying that you looked like a boy out for a holiday, Sir James," said

Gertrude, turning her pretty bright face to the old man.

"I assure you I feel like one," was the reply; "you can form no idea of what a real charity it is to ask me into the country."

"I wonder that you don't take a house in the country, as you are so fond of it," said Leonie.

"Ah, my dear Lady Bournemouth, that is precisely one of my favourite castles in the air. You smile? Well—it is preposterous to talk of castle building at seventy-five; but the truth is, I have never been able to make up my mind to leave London. After all, one can't live half a century in a place without becoming fond of it, and all my ties and associations are there. And London is the best place for work, I find."

"Do you never think of a holiday? Surely half a century, and more, of hard work justifies a rest?" said Gertrude.

"A rest—a holiday, yes; but no more. As long as a man can work he is bound to do it."

"What a dreadful theory!" cried Ger-

trude, shrugging her shoulders. "You will suit Leonie here. She is always on a moral treadmill, and wants to put me on one too."

"Lady Bournemouth and I are old friends; we understand one another perfectly," he said, with a nod to Leonie.

She replied by a gentle, grateful smile, such as a daughter might give to a father, for, in truth, of no one's friendship was Leonie so proud as of Sir James'! She had made his acquaintance in the West Indies, during her first husband's life-time, when she was a beautiful young wife, surrounded by trials and temptations, and he was the only real honest friend she had in the world. He pitied her much, and admired her more, admired her stedfast courage, her lofty integrity and rightmindedness; and in many a sore strait and struggle had helped her with advice to her face, and fought her battles behind her back. He had helped her too with her education, for she had learnt nothing at home but music, dancing,

and languages; he had discovered to herself her great powers of mind, had taught her to train them, and was now as proud of her as if she were really his daughter.

"Do you really think London the best place for work; literary work, I mean?" said Gertrude. "I should have thought the quiet and solitude of the country would be more favourable to thought."

"If you want to write for men, you must live among men, whether in London or elsewhere," said Sir James. "Without going into the question in the abstract, look at living instances. All our best men live a great deal in society. I was talking to Kinghorn about this very subject this morning, and advising him to come out of his shell a little. It would do him all the good in the world."

"What do you think of him? Is there anything in him?" said Leonie.

"Don't you know him?" said Sir James, replying to one question by another in true Scotch fashion.

"Only through his books. I never saw him till this morning."

"And what do you think of them? I had rather hear your opinion than tell you mine."

"Frankly then, I don't much like any of these young poets. They are far too 'subjective' for my taste; am I using that word rightly? I never know, but, as I understand it, it expresses my meaning perfectly."

"Go on, I understand you."

"He seems to me to have all the faults of his class; mistiness, which he mistakes for depth; wordiness—I wish I could prune off two-thirds of his double-barrelled adjectives! 'wire drawing;' strained interpretations of nature, both in men and things; want of originality; though whether that is an unpardonable fault in a very young man, is a question I have my doubts about. At all events, it is a fault in him, for, if all I hear of him be true, he has compressed into his twenty-one years the experience of forty-one."

"I see you take it for granted that originality cannot exist without personal experience," said Sir James, smiling.

"It is a favourite theory of mine, so, like a true woman, I beg the question first, and argue upon it afterwards," returned Leonie. "But to conclude my list of Mr Kinghorn's sins, I object to his thoroughly morbid tone, and this, to my mind, is the greatest sin of all. I can forgive a great deal if the tone is healthy and true-hearted, the core sound and good."

"You have made out a fair case against him; now what are his good points? for you are better read in him than I am, and I generally trust your judgment about poetry."

"Great beauty of thought here and there, great ease and facility of versifying, exquisite taste sometimes in his choice of words, and a true, though mistaken, love of nature."

"And therein lies one of the chief sins of all these young poets. They worship nature—and nothing else, and the results are sad and dwarfing accordingly."

"You must give me your opinion now," said Leonie, playfully; "you are not to pick my brains, and give me no crumb of yours."

"My opinion does not materially differ from

yours; only I look on his failings with a more lenient eye than you do. But, mind you, he will never be a great poet. With pains and time he may become a good one; or, at all events, a good man, which is rather more to the purpose."

A deep, thoughtful smile crossed Leonie's face.

"I like to talk to you," she said, "you don't lead me astray. It is such a temptation to rest satisfied with the means without going on to the end."

"Rest satisfied with the means without going on to the end!" said Gertrude, mystified. "Sir James, can you understand her, for I can't?"

"Lady Bournemouth and I have talked this subject over before, and know what we mean, and understand one another's terms. What is the end of all art, poetic as well as pictorial?"

"The end? Amusement? Refinement? To improve people's tastes?"

"Education, in one word, whether of the taste, or, still better, of the character. And if

we lose sight of this object, and stop short to worship the art itself, that is resting satisfied with the means, without going on to the end, as Lady Bournemouth rather vaguely put it."

Sir James unconsciously took up with Gertrude the same tone he was in the habit of using to Leonie; that of a father teaching a daughter, whereat Gertrude was sufficiently pleased. She was far above the vulgarity of lionizing; when she asked celebrities, it was with the full intention of personally enjoying them; and when they accepted, she was rather afraid of them, and glad to take shelter under the wing of some common friend.

"And so," said Sir James, "our young friend has gone off to take a solitary walk?"

"Much to Henry's disgust," returned Gertrude. "He likes to see people enjoying themselves together. I told him that perhaps Mr Kinghorn was enjoying himself after his own fashion."

"And what did he answer?"

"'Then he has no business to be enjoying himself.' Henry is a little bit of a tyrant in

these things; he has his own ideas, and likes people to conform to them."

"Depend upon it, in this case he is perfectly right," said Sir James. "If I know Mr Kinghorn, he is the last man in the world capable of legitimately enjoying solitude."

"How so? Surely it is an innocent pleasure?" said Gertrude.

"Not to him. When he goes out by himself, it is only to indulge morbid fancies, and build castles; not castles connected with his work, but with himself; the true curse of talent."

"I see you won't say 'genius,'" said Leonie smiling.

"When you return to London," said Sir James, "I will introduce to you a young friend of mine; also a poet, and also of the lower classes; and you shall see if he is not made of rather different stuff from poor Kinghorn."

"And may I not know him also?" said Gertrude.

"No—I reserve these sights for my very particular and trusty friends. I have tried Lady Bournemouth, and know she can be

relied upon; but, in general, you fine ladies are the ruin of promising young men."

"Gertrude does not lionize," said Leonie; "at least, she does not mean to do so."

"Only somehow she does! Lady Kincardine, I advise you to take the Life of Robert Burns from the library when you go home, read it through, and when I find you have taken it thoroughly in, and laid it to heart—"

"You will introduce me to your friend?" said Gertrude, eagerly.

"Perhaps; who knows? I don't promise, mind. But, Lady Bournemouth, you are seeing nothing of the curling. We did not come here to talk. Look at Mrs McLeod, how she watches every turn of the game! She seems to know as much about it as any of the men."

"Oh, she does," said Gertrude. "Invercarron exacts that of her. If she were ready to drop with fatigue, he would still expect her to remain and look on, and would even, I think, be displeased if she sat down. I wonder he allowed her to stay here, instead of going home and appearing at the supper he will give the men to-night. But come, Leonie, let us

get out. Sir James, are you not cold? Will you not dismount and escort us?"

Sir James complied, and the three proceeded to the curling pond, and watched the game with great interest, its mysteries being explained to them by the surrounding gentlemen. At last Leonie's feet became so cold that she could bear it no longer, and Gertrude being in the same predicament, they proposed to return, when it was discovered that all the other ladies were ready to do so, except Mrs McLeod, who looked very tired, but said with a glance at her husband that she should like to see it out, and could very well walk back. This Gertrude would not allow, and promised to send the carriage for her. She cast a wistful glance at the ladies in the barouche, as they drove off comfortably nestled in cushions and wraps, Mrs Tredegar in the highest spirits, for she fancied she had enchanted Mr Elston, and, with her usual eye to business, calculated on securing him for her London parties.

Mrs Tredegar was a lion-hunter of the first calibre, a lion-hunter to whose feats Gordon

Cumming's were child's-play, and Jules Gerard's folly. Indeed, she had a smooth tongue, and a ready wit of her own, and knew how to catch and tame the whole roaring tribe, who are not more, but alas! rather less, free from the weakness of vanity than their obscurer neighbours. She was undeniably clever, and endowed with a tact that never failed her; in a word, the type of those fine ladies who are, as good old Sir James has just told us, the ruin of promising young men,—and old ones too, for that matter, whereof my readers can doubtless recall some deplorable instances for themselves.

"What an insufferable woman that is!" said Mrs Chetwynd to Gertrude, when they arrived at Kincardine Castle.

"What has gone wrong, Georgie?" said Gertrude, after Mrs Chetwynd had walked away. "Was Mrs Dudley too successful with the great man?"

"Rather; and she seems most likely to secure the prize, which is mortifying."

"So I should think. Leonie, you will

come to my room before you dress, won't you?"

"Before or after. I am going to rest a little now."

Accordingly, about a quarter of an hour before the second bell rang Leonie proceeded to Lady Kincardine's room, and found her in the act of putting on a very elaborate silk dress.

"How smart you are!" she said. "Is that new?"

"Oh, yes—I was obliged to take a few new things into the country with me; my London ones were all quite done for;—somehow they always are. But it was enormously expensive."

"You have such a quantity of trimming on your dresses; why do you let them put on so much? It is not becoming."

"Oh, I don't know; Madame Armand will do it—I have spoken about it often. But you are so very plain." Leonie cast a glance at the glass, where her own tall black figure and colourless face were reflected, looking grand and old-world, and unlike enough to Gertrude, who might have stepped out of a book of fashions.

"I am rather in the other extreme," she said, "but you are really too much flounced and frilled to-day. However, it suits you better than it would most people."

As she said this, she sat down by the dressing table, and began carelessly turning over Gertrude's ornaments.

"Give me your keys, and let me look at your diamonds," she said. "I am quite like a child about all these things."

Gertrude took her keys out of a little locked box, and handed them to her.

"That is the key of the jewel box," she said.

For a time Leonie talked on, amusing herself meanwhile by turning over the diamonds, and trying how they would suit herself; then she suddenly got up, went to the window, drew aside the curtains, and tried to make a small mark with a diamond bracelet on a corner of the pane.

"What are you doing?" cried Gertrude, springing forwards; "you will spoil my diamonds!"

"Oh, my Lady!" said the maid, who re-

tained the lace of Gertrude's dress in her hand, thereby preventing her from reaching the window, "your Ladyship will be so late, for there is the dinner bell ringing, and I have not nearly finished, and the cape of this dress always takes a long time to pin on."

While this expostulation was being made, Leonie coolly tried one more experiment with the glass; then reäppeared from behind the curtain, saying, "It was a superstition of my youth that diamonds would cut glass; but yours do not."

"Indeed, I'm very glad they don't," said Gertrude quickly, her face becoming scarlet. "The night is rather too cold to have one's window-panes cut out."

"I could scarcely cut them out with a diamond bracelet, even if I were inclined to try," laughed Leonie. "But they ought to mark. See, this ring of mine marks."

And pulling a diamond ring off her finger, she went back to the window; and presently a very satisfactory squeak was heard, such as diamonds make when scratching glass.

"There! I have made a little line, just in

that corner," said Leonie. "What has happened to your diamonds?"

"I don't know;—perhaps their faces are not as sharply cut as yours. But give me them back; I must lock them up before I go down-stairs."

Her manner was flurried and nervous; she snatched, rather than took, the diamonds from Leonie, thrust them into their places, and ran down-stairs without once looking round.

The evening passed off well; there was a large party, as, besides the people already staying in the house, a great many of the neighbours had been asked to dinner. Gertrude was in her element; at all times she was an admirable hostess, and never shone more than in a gathering of this sort, where some little tact was required to make the component parts amalgamate. Under her skilful management everything harmonized; everybody was amused and pleased, and no one felt himself neglected or dull. Even Mr Kinghorn, whose depression was not entirely causeless, as every one acquainted with his history knew, became lively and cheerful; Mr Elston came

down from the clouds, opened his mouth and SPOKE! a word which well deserves capitals, for if an oracle had spoken it could not have been received with more reverent attention. He spoke, moreover, very excellent sense and fine humour, in itself a cheering thing in this world, where such commodities are scarce.

After dinner there were some peculiarly Scotch games, such as breaking the egg, &c., which, though more specially appropriate to Hallowe'en or Christmas Eve, were considered allowable on any winter's night, and proved a great amusement to the English guests, and a serious interest to the Scotch ones. When, late in the evening, the last of the dinner-party had departed, Sir Henry proposed that as no one seemed inclined for bed the party in the house should go to the hall, and tell stories round the fire. To the great dimly-lighted oak hall they all repaired accordingly, drawing their chairs round the roaring fire, which flickered and danced on oaken wreaths, antique armour, and stags' heads. "Let it be a ghost story," said Gertrude, "a horrible and well-authenticated one. Leonie,

you are a good story-teller; can't you remember one?"

"I don't know any English ones," said Leonie, "and the Scotch ones you probably know better than I do. Would you like a West Indian story?"

"By all means, Lady Bournemouth," said Mr Elston; "one is tired of the old-established English and Scotch legends, and the new ones are poor stuff; your beautiful land is full of materials of interest and wonder, and I dare say they will lose nothing in your working up."

"A West Indian story will be great fun—aw," remarked Mr Mowbray; an observation which procured him an indignant glance from the great man, who was confounded at any one's thinking it necessary to endorse his approval.

Leonie, with a smile dancing round the corners of her beautiful mouth, which died away as she proceeded, began in a low thrilling tone a wild, weird West Indian legend, full of horror, blood, crime, and fearful retribution, ghostly and bodily. Mr Elston said

rightly, the materials lost nothing in her working up. As she finished, sinking her voice almost to a whisper, which thrilled to the very marrow of her startled audience,—

"Aw, vewy pretty,—I vote we go and smoke," said Mr Mowbray.

"Here is Willie," said Sir Henry, as a carriage drove up to the door.

"Willie! I had quite forgotten that he was coming," said Gertrude.

Sir Henry had not, not for one moment. All through the evening he had been watching and listening for the sound of those carriage wheels, and wondering why they tarried.

"Better late than never, Willie," he said as his brother entered.

END OF VOL. II.

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